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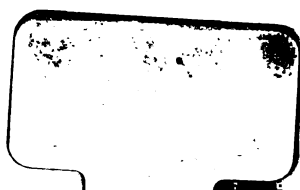
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GUY WATERMAN.

A Novel.

BY

JOHN SAUNDERS,

AUTHOR OF 'ABEL DRAKE'S WIFE,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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GUY WATERMAN.

CHAPTER I.

AT PHCEBE'S BEDROOM WINDOW.

A YOUNG woman is stepping lightly through the winding street of the village, making a call here and there as she goes. Now she visits some poor family to take a message from the curate, and perhaps to leave a gift that has been intrusted to her ; now she looks in upon some one of her juvenile Sunday-school flock. Wherever she goes people are delighted by her fair features, her excessively kind manner, and by her willingness to take so much trouble for their good. And very much she seems to enjoy the praises and blessings that are poured forth upon her ; and, if she does make any difference in the treatment of the people she is so desirous to benefit

it must be owned the advantage is in favour of those who are loudest in their professions of gratitude.

But there are, as there always will be, dissenting and uncharitable tongues. One lynx-eyed neighbour, who has been sitting in the dark corner of the last cottage the young lady visited, suggests, after she is gone,

‘Ay, she’s mighty sweet on the curate now! Allus a running after his little sperituel errands and afetching and acarrying like a pretty lapdog to please him. Much he cares! He can see as well as you and I. But as she does it all for the “good o’ the Church,” why shouldn’t he let her go on adoining?’

But, nevertheless, people look after her with interest as she trips along so daintily through the street. Even those who are the most severe and critical in their comments cannot but feel the fascination. Her personal appearance is a fruitful theme for village discussion. The young solicitor of the place colours as he meets her, bows and passes, and is aware she has vouchsafed him just one little winning smile. But when he goes up to the landlord of the ‘Load

of Hay,' to have a gossip over a glass of brandy-and water, while professing to go through with him a little legal business, he is rather surprised to hear old Robertson's opinions of the girl who has just passed :—Robertson being notoriously a critic in female beauty.

'Beauty! Well, I suppose she is reckoned a beauty as things go now-a-days; but she's too much like a fine white cat to please me. She's a nice figure enough, to be sure—straight and lissome, and a neat-turned ankle. Yes, she has. But look at her; she has just come out of the baker's yonder; see how sharp her eyes be as to any men about, if they be at all decent-looking; working man or gentleman, it's all the same so far as the admiration goes. If only a young tramp looks at her admiringly, she knows it. That isn't according to my notion of things. And look at her walk, just like a dancer's in them thin frippery boots. You never hear her coming. She glides up to you just like a cat. She's coming back this way; don't say anything, but see how she'll look at us as she passes.'

True enough, there was just one of those peculiar

looks from the young lady that seemed to challenge admiration on the one hand, and to take full measure of the person looked at on the other, as she repassed the speaker and his companion. She had on a violet-coloured shawl. Her arms were half-crossed on her bosom, and displayed the white lady-like hands and the long pointed fingers. Her hair was light and tawny-coloured, was turned off her face, and had little round curls like rings plastered on her cheeks. She wore a bonnet open at the ears, to show off the long gold ear-rings she had obtained from her dead mother; and a little black spotted veil, which, while appearing to conceal her features, had really no other effect than to make the wearer fancy she ought to be more at ease in scrutinizing the faces of passers-by. Again and again both the observers noticed the peculiar way she had of looking round sideways through the corners of her eyes, as if under the habitual fancy of her being watched or followed.

When she was fairly out of hearing, the landlord of the 'Load of Hay' continued his comments—

'She's an artful one, if I be not mistaken; ay, and she knows what's what in dress, and in a good

many other things. That violet shawl's to show off her uncommon fair complexion, I s'pose. But it's too fair for me.'

'Well, Mr. Robertson, I had no notion you had been so severe a judge of a pretty girl. But surely you see something to admire?'

'H—m!' muttered the landlord, still looking after the retreating figure as he leaned against the lintel of his door. 'Her eyes are well enough—a clear light-blue; but then again, there are her eyebrows and eyelashes, so pale in colour that you must look sharp to see 'em at all.'

'What about her temper? They say she's very amiable,' observed the young lawyer, whose face looked uncomfortable, as men are apt to look when suspicious they have been making fools of themselves.

'Well, I can't contradict that myself, and yet I have seen her when she seemed a little upset, and when those nice blue veins in her temple, that look so delicate upon her low, white, straight forehead, were swelled to twice their proper size, and all of a dark purple. Somehow I've no notion of a woman's face

that hasn't a bit of regular colour in it, except her lips, and them so very red, that I declare I couldn't help once fancying they were like a line of blood.'

But Susanna, for she it was, grown up into womanhood (as, no doubt, intelligent readers have already guessed), still tripped lightly along, unconscious of these spots in the sun of her good fortune, until she reached home. Lightly she touched the latch and opened the door; lightly she stepped in, and put down the basket containing some provisions she had been purchasing; and then, taking from it two ripe pears and some small biscuits, she passed lightly up the stairs to the room of the invalided Phœbe.

Yes, Phœbe is reduced at last to her bedchamber: and the little she can see from her couch by the window is her all of the visible world. She has struggled on through the many years that have passed since we last saw her; and she still lives: but that is about all. On the table in front of the couch is a plate with a solitary bit of dry cold meat, which Phœbe has been trying to make up her mind to eat for the last hour, but in vain; she turns from it with ill-repressed disgust.

Poor Phœbe ! She looks but a mere spectre of her former self ; and the white bed-gown which she wears as a dressing-gown over the lower portions of her dress increases the effect of her ghastly paleness. From the bed to the couch, and from the couch back again to the bed, these are Phœbe's daily wanderings ; and, if you look at her still bright and energetic eye, you can see that she feels her position as some naturally wild animal must feel its cage when snatched from its native woodlands and condemned thenceforward to pace wearily, fretfully, and hopelessly to and fro within its impassable inclosure of a few feet or yards square. But you can also perceive that she is more patient than of old. Suffering has done its work in chastening as well as in breaking down ; and, as Phœbe looks towards the door to greet Susanna's return, there is an almost moving pathos in the expression of the eye, and in the sound of the voice, as she says,

‘I am so glad you've come back, Susy. I can't bear to miss you long.’

‘So,’ says Susy, coming up to Phœbe, and putting her arms about her neck, and kissing her ; ‘so, you

couldn't eat your bit of meat. I don't wonder, I'm sure. I shall take it away. There. And now I shall put in its place these pears, so ripe and juicy! And aren't they big? And beside the pears I shall put these sweet little biscuits, which I have been out on purpose to get for you.'

'Well, dear, I do think you've brought me the only things in all this wide, wide world that I can eat just now; for, O Susy, I am very very unhappy.'

'About Guy?'

'Yes. He's off again with those poacher friends of his; and I know they won't let him alone till they've got him into trouble. Oh! if he should go into Branhape Park and get shot at by the keepers!'

'Oh! but I think he won't.'

'Why do you think so?'

'Because I begged he wouldn't go there—and he laughed and said I needn't be afraid,' was Susanna's reply.

'Well, that's some comfort. I wonder why she asked him,' Phoebe mused to herself; but presently she saw quite clearly, and said aloud, with an animated tone, 'Of course, he musn't offend a certain

young lady ; and therefore musn't offend that young lady's guardian.'

Susanna was glad that her face happened to be turned away from Phœbe's ; for, although she was getting tolerably skilful in concealing the effect upon her of any special and sudden news, yet, she had not expected this particular remark ; and, indeed, had for some time past been looking for one of a very different nature, and was therefore a little taken aback. Not that Susanna did not know perfectly well that there was some secret and possibly unrecognized feeling in Guy's heart towards Miss Lucy Dalrymple ; but she had hoped that Phœbe had not noticed it, or had not thought it worth dwelling on. Her voice a little trembled as she put the question,

'Do you mean, mother (Susanna, for some time past, had got into the habit of calling Phœbe mother), that Guy cares about Miss Dalrymple ?'

'Well, he never said so to me,' answered Phœbe ;
'but hark ! I hear a lady's horse coming along. It's hers, I'll be bound. What can bring ~~her~~ this way ? Surely she is not coming here ? Susy,

dear, how is the place downstairs, if she comes in ?'

'Oh, I'll run down and put it to rights in a minute ;' and off Susy went, conscious that among her other notorious excellences she did not venture to include a tidy kitchen (or house-place), now that Phœbe was no longer able to see to it herself. But even while Susanna created rapidly a kind of order, by unceremoniously sweeping everything out of sight, into drawers, cupboards, or the back yard, no matter what, no matter where, she kept frequently looking at herself in the glass and retouching her hair ; and she also went again and again furtively to the window to see if there were yet any signs of this approaching, and to her thoughts ill-omened, visitor. Presently horse and rider turned a corner ; it was Miss Lucy Dalrymple ; and she was evidently approaching, though leisurely, the Watermans' cottage. Susanna made for herself a snug outlook, by means of one of the long chinks in the many-leaved shutter, which happened to be partially open, to keep out the mid-day sun, and thence she gazed upon the young creature whom,

though she had never before seen her except from a distance, she already hated, and feared even more than she hated. Well, now she could have a good look at her, and judge for herself how far she was by her beauty or by her influence likely to be a successful rival. She could not have had a better opportunity, for the youthful horsewoman guided her horse not to the door, but to the very window of Phœbe's bedroom, and there waved her hand. Phœbe saw, and hurriedly opened the casement, and found the young heiress so close to her, as she sat on her high and delicate-limbed horse, that their heads were almost on the same level, and Phœbe was able to clasp the soft warm hand that was held out.

Susanna's countenance changed as she looked on that sweet, bright, and fresh picture of youthful grace. Lucy was in the first bloom of womanly beauty. Her features were not strictly regular, and her complexion was not very fair; but the whole expression of the head and face was of that sweetness and buoyancy that could only exist with a pure and happy spirit. Her cheeks were

tinged with a healthy glow ; her eyes sparkled as though some fresh thought came up every instant to the sun and was there revealed, like a dewdrop in the violet, to the world by its splendour ; her dark rich hair, partly escaping in the breeze from under the confinement of her hat, kept dancing against her neck ; while her form, slender and graceful as a young willow, swayed to and fro with every movement of the horse, who champed his bit, and struck his foot down on the ground, and arched his head, and in these and various other modes manifested his opinion that his young mistress ought to be again letting loose his rein, that they might have another scamper across the neighbouring common, from which they had just come.

And if Susanna was displeased at what she saw, she did not find compensation in that which she heard ; though it was like a chord of music thrilling through Phoebe's more sympathetic nature when Lucy said to her,

‘ I hope you are better. I did not know till yesterday you had been so very ill. Can we help you ? My uncle desires me to say he will gladly.

do so. How I wish you could get out this lovely morning! Do you think you could venture if we were to send some one to drive you out a bit?’

‘O no, miss; but I thank you and the good squire a thousand times for thinking of such a thing.’

From this the two dropped into more general talk, Lucy listening to the recital of Phœbe’s illnesses with unaffected interest and sympathy.

‘I wonder,’ thought Susanna, as she still peered through the chink of the shutter on the ground story below, ‘what she’s staying for? If that’s what she came for, why doesn’t she go when it’s all done? Oh! they are beginning to talk low, are they, so that I mayn’t hear? What can Mrs. Waterman be saying? O yes, of course, it makes Miss Lucy smile! O yes, and blush! and now she turns her head away! Yes, but she wants more of the same sort. O yes! she’s setting Mrs. Waterman on again. How I hate people to speak so that you can’t hear what they have to say! I wish some gadfly would sting her horse and send

him scampering, and if he threw her I shouldn't be sorry.

'And does Guy think that brown-faced chit more beautiful than me? He can't be such a fool. No; but she's a lady—a squire's heiress; and no doubt it seems very romantic to him to be able to fancy such a woman in love with him. But is she in love with him? I wish I knew that. She can't mean to marry him. She can only mean to amuse herself a bit with his admiration, and then toss him aside when a rich man woos her. Or, perhaps, like some grand ladies that I have heard of, she means to marry somebody else, but have her lover too. Ah! what would she give to know the secret I know? It frightens me only to think of it. She'd soon settle all my chances.

'Oh, she's going at last! No! Another stop. My life on it, she wants to say something that she hasn't the courage to bring out. I must hear what it is. I will. I'll creep up the stairs and put my head just inside the door. Mrs. Waterman can't see me there, and then I can hear plainly enough, I'll be bound.'

Susanna drew back from the shutter and stole up the stairs till she could put her head in on the level of the floor, while lying at length on the stairs. She was just in time. Lucy was saying,

‘Oh, before I wish you good-morning, Mrs. Waterman, I musn’t forget to give you a friendly warning with regard to your son.’

‘There ’tis! I knew ’twas coming,’ commented Susanna to herself.

‘My uncle, you know, has always had a kindly feeling towards him, but—but of late he seems to be turning against him. He hears so many complaints of him from the keepers of neighbouring gentlemen, and he’s so angry with him about his indolence, and his not getting into some suitable employment, that—that I’m afraid he’d be very harsh with Guy if he were to get into trouble.’

Susanna could not hear that Phœbe said anything in answer. A deep sigh seemed to be her only response.

‘Perhaps, Mrs. Waterman, you could get Guy to keep out of my uncle’s way for a bit, for if they met just now I’m sure there would be angry talk,

and perhaps a quarrel that you and Guy might long regret afterwards. My uncle is one of the best of men, only you must study him and yield to him when you can. There, now, I've got that off my mind. So, once more, good-by!' An instant after Susanna heard the horse cantering away, as though desirous to make up for so much wasted time.

Susanna crawled down the stairs again and moved noisily about, so that she might not seem to have been listening; but presently she sat down in the kitchen, staring blankly into the air, her face distorted by passion, which she was striving not unsuccessfully to quell.

'Yes; it's not what I feel, but what I think just now, that must be minded. She'll be too much for me, with so many advantages on her side, if I don't do something. But what? What? What?'

For some time she sat thus, till at last the stormy darkness passed from her brow, and was succeeded by a gleam of sinister light. She stood up, and seemed concentrating all her faculties for some new movement. Her breast began to heave,

her features to quiver, tears to start to her eyes—not, as with most people, from lack of control, but from seeming excess of it. She shook her hair partly loose, disarranged her dress, and altogether gave one the impression of an inspired actress about to rush on the stage to play some great and passionate part with which her soul was full. She then seemed to feel that she had evoked sufficiently the force of the passion she was about to display, and that some check would be necessary to give it the fullest effect; and it was in obedience to the double impulse thus moving her that she ascended the stairs, walked quietly into the room, turned away from Phœbe when the latter looked at her, 'did not answer her when she spoke, or only in such muffled and broken tones that Phœbe could make nothing out of them, and, when at last Phœbe repeated in a voice of distress,

‘For Heaven’s sake, Susy, speak! keep me no longer in suspense; what is it?’

Susanna turned, and, with a sort of despairing wail and a thick sobbing voice, ran to her, clasped her knees, dropped on her own knees beside her,

and bent her head in, what Phœbe felt to be, overpowering anguish.

‘My poor child! my poor child! Oh, how blind I have been; you needn’t speak; I know well enough what you would say. My poor Susy! I thought you didn’t care for him! You know I have often asked you, and you never would own anything.’

‘No—no; and I didn’t mean to do it now if—if—if—she—she hadn’t come;’ and again Susanna’s grief swept all control before it, and Phœbe could do nothing but lay her own head upon the fair mourner’s below, and wait till the violence of the coming storm was somewhat abated, so that they might take counsel together. One thing, however, she did say, in her warm-hearted desire to soothe the poor girl,

‘There may be hope yet, you know.’

And although Susanna after that broke out into a fresh and more irresistible fit of weeping than ever, it is by no means certain that the young lady had not heard the words, and laid them by for future use. To win Phœbe to her side would

be an achievement of no little consequence under the circumstances; and Susanna, through all her bitter distress, was more comforted by Phœbe's assurance than Phœbe herself would just then have been quite satisfied to know.

CHAPTER II.

ERRING COURSES.

WHEN Lucy left the cottage, and, crossing a corner of the village, got out into a green lane where she was unobserved, she drew rein, and made her horse walk slowly along. She seemed troubled in thought. Once she pulled off her glove and put her hand to her face to feel it, and seemed to find it, as she had expected, hot and flushed. Then again she seemed angry with herself, and made a gesture with her whip, as if to throw off contemptuously some absurd thought; but the cheek only grew hotter and the discomfort greater.

‘What a little fool I am! First I won’t, then I will, and then, when it’s too late, I return once more to the won’t. If I did speak about him, what more natural, when I was there, and when both the squire and myself have always been so friendly

with him, and when I know he is in danger and needs a word of good counsel. And yet I couldn't be mistaken in his mother's manner. Her eyes sparkled, and she looked at me—I don't know how; but there! I am getting hotter than ever, and uncle is waiting for me to ride after the hounds. If I go in like this, he'll be sure to notice it, and ask me where I've been; and then, when I tell him, if he looks at me at all particularly, I know I shall look absurdly confused. And all about nothing. What's Guy to me? What can he be? No, no! that's clear enough. So I'll just ride along slowly under these trees, and think of some more sensible subject.'

But while Lucy was making to herself these sage resolves, she came upon a party, the sight of whom put them all instantly to flight. This consisted of three men: one very young, the others some years older. The first, tall, slender, and of strikingly winning personal appearance; the others, hard, dogged-looking fellows, who seemed to have been ill-used by the world, and to be ready to make war upon the world in return on the slightest

provocation. They were not really bad-looking fellows when you could penetrate to their true looks; but they seemed to have cultivated so much roughness in their manner and dress, and their faces were so unshaven, and their linen—where they showed any—was so dirty, that most observers were content with the first impression, and did not care to inquire further. But the young man, though dressed almost as badly as they were, looked a very angel of refinement beside them; indeed, it had been a favourite joke among them to call Guy ‘the lady’ till he thrashed the author of the joke severely, and then they let him alone; or rather, then they changed the appellation, and called him ‘the gentleman.’ But these names were not intended to convey any sense of want of manliness in him, whether of appearance, conduct, or character, but simply to express the refinement that was stamped on every lineament of his face, in the form and play of every limb of his body, in the glance of his eye, the tone of his voice, and in the very set of his head as he turned on one side to think—a little trick of his which Phœbe

had often watched and gloated over in her fierce love. But this refinement seemed to be so little to his own taste, that he rather cultivated a blunt, bold way of speaking; and it was the seeming contrast, but real harmony, that existed between these two things that gave so great a charm to Guy's bearing. His rude companions, for instance, while finding him capable of sympathizing with them for what they were, were only the more powerfully attracted by the brilliant qualities they vaguely recognized in him, and which they knew well enough they had not.

The two older men were lying on the ground some distance back from the road; they were smoking, and appeared to be waiting the good pleasure of the youthful Guy. He was in advance, pacing to and fro, as Lucy approached, and for a moment she fancied he was not aware of her presence, or else that he did not mean to take any notice of her—a result she fervently prayed for when she saw the two forbidding-looking men back there by the hedge. But just as she reached the spot where Guy walked, and was about to pass him,

wondering if she ought to speak, he stepped in front of the horse, gently, but suddenly took hold of the rein, and said,

‘If I interrupt you so rudely, I don’t want to frighten your horse, so perhaps you’ll excuse it.’

‘O yes,’ replied Lucy, trying to smile, but feeling strangely nervous and uncomfortable at being thus arrested.

‘You met my father this morning, I think?’

‘Y—yes,’ confessed the guilty Lucy, after a moment’s hesitation.

‘And he asked you for money?’

‘Certainly not.’

‘Would you be so good as to explain?’

‘I pressed it on him: he was poor. Why should he not allow me to assist him?’

‘I do not care, Miss Dalrymple, to discuss that question. Miss Dalrymple, he sends it back to you. Will you take it, or shall I leave it with Mrs. Hammett?’

Lucy could not answer him immediately. Shame at Guy’s having discovered her gift, and anger at his proud tone, and pity for poor old Waterman’s

loss, made the tears come into her eyes. But presently she raised them and looked at him haughtily, and held out her hand.

Guy put the money into it, and said,

‘Forgive me for stopping you.’

He let go the bridle, but Lucy still held her horse reined in. Her anger was rising, as Guy could see by her crimsoning cheek and the flash of her dark blue eyes, in which there was a slightly sarcastic expression as she looked at him.

‘Guy Waterman,’ she said, ‘if I have done wrong in this, I am sorry; but let me ask this:—Pray are *you* a fitting person to be so very careful of your father’s credit. Your parents are poor. You and your friends here,’ and Lucy looked round with a pretty scorn, which made Guy wince, ‘don’t think much of poverty, perhaps, but I have just seen your mother; she is looking very, very much worse, and—’

‘Well, I can’t help it,’ cried Guy, impatiently and miserably, for Phœbe’s illness was a sore point with him.

‘Yes, you can,’ said Lucy, flatly.

‘How?’

‘Don’t let her begrudge herself every morsel of bread she eats, and break her heart with thinking how it will be paid for. If you’re so proud with me, be a little proud with her.’

Guy coloured, and would have made some angry answer, when he heard a sound that caused him to forget the words he was going to say.

The squire’s horse was trotting down the hollow road towards them.

‘My uncle!’ cried Lucy. ‘Oh, go away, do, Guy, I beg you.’

‘It is too late to do so now without his seeing me. I had better stay.’

Mr. Dalrymple pulled up his horse violently as he reached them, and the horse’s feet splashed the mud into Guy’s face. He wiped it off, and smiled as he met the squire’s gaze; but the latter was in no mood to understand that simple and harmless smile.

‘How dare you stop my niece and talk to her before these vagabonds?’

The ‘vagabonds’ had now risen, and, after a parley,

advanced, as though to see into Guy's situation, and be ready if he needed their aid.

'I have done, sir,' answered Guy, respectfully.

'Done, sir! I wish you had done—done with your idleness, done with your insolent airs, done with your absurd behaviour — consorting with poachers and playing the gentleman. But I warn you! Keep out of my way. By the Lord, I'll send you to gaol if I catch you poaching: mind that!'

Guy listened with a haughty smile on his face that only the more exasperated the squire; but the latter, seeing the frightened and beseeching looks of Lucy, said to her,

'Come; and I beg you never to speak to this fellow more.'

The two moved away, Lucy casting one piteous glance at Guy's face, which seemed almost black with suppressed passion, as he leaned back against a tree watching their departure. Presently he said to one of the poachers,

'Well, Marks, I had made up my mind to tell you I should never go on another expedition;

but now I say one more, boys, at all events, and in spite of whatever happens! And this time I'll do what I never did before—go to his own preserves.'

After a brief talk they arranged their meeting-place for the night, and then the two older men went into a coppice and disappeared, while Guy threw himself on the sward; and, reclining with his head on one arm, began to meditate in no very joyous mood on the many facts and fancies that oppressed him, and on the joyless future he saw opening.

CHAPTER III.

AN EXPEDITION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

THE moonlight was pouring down upon hill and wood, upon coppice and dell, bathing the whole surface of the ground in a soft white glory, and producing strange and fantastic shadows where it caught some gnarled and leafless branch projecting out from the depths of the foliage, when whispering voices were heard :—

‘Hist!’

‘Marks?’

‘All right! Seen Guy?’

‘Yes; he’s exploring a bit before we begin. That young fellow has the courage of the Old ‘un!’

‘Keep close. I hear the twigs crackling on the ground. The keepers’ll be uncommon wide awake to-night. The moon’s as good as a lantern for ‘em to track us with. I wanted Guy to put it off; but

he said, "No, this were his last night o' vagabondizing;" and so we let the bargain stand. There he is!'

Guy now approached, keeping under the thick shadows of the hedgerows. When he met them he said, in a low tone,

'I have just seen the keepers. There are three of them, all armed.'

'Well,' said Marks, 'we are three too, and our guns are as good.'

'That's all very well,' said Guy; 'but I don't want to hurt men for doing their duty, though I do mean to have what I came for—a bird or two, or a rabbit—before I go home. So let us get out of their way and not provoke danger or bloodshed.'

Although the advice was accepted it was not acted on, for a hare starting across their path, was shot at and killed by one of the two men before Guy could interpose.

'Now,' said he, 'we shall have the keepers upon us in two minutes. Run—this way!'

But it so happened they ran on to the very muzzles of the keepers' guns as they crouched under

a hedge to catch the poachers. In an instant there was a wild scuffle — oaths and execrations were lavished freely, and one of the guns went off in the strife, though without doing any damage. Presently Marks threw his antagonist heavily on the sward, and then, in a savage fury at some injury he had received, fired his gun at the keeper as he was trying to get up. A deep groan told all the combatants that the night's sport was growing serious. A keeper was seriously, perhaps fatally, injured. The guilty poacher stared a moment at his victim, then turned and fled.

‘Guy! help!’ now cried the other man. Guy, who had freed himself during the agitation produced by the shot and had got some steps away, returned at this appeal and threw himself violently upon the two keepers, who were struggling with the remaining poacher. They quitted their hold, and, before they could regain it, Guy had clasped with his right arm one man round the waist and dragged him backward, while with the left he clutched at the neckcloth of the other, so that for a few seconds he detained them both. The freed poacher started

off with the rapidity of one of the wild animals he was so fond of, and Guy relaxed his hold, saying, as soon as he could speak,

‘It wasn’t he who fired the gun, or I wouldn’t have meddled.’

‘Well, young fellow, this’ll be a bad night’s job for you, I guess. How is it, Markham?’ said the keeper, stooping over the wounded man. There was no reply. The keeper was either dead or had fainted.

Guy knelt down, felt his heart, then asked them if they had any brandy. One of the keepers pulled out a flask, Guy got a few drops into the man’s mouth, and had the satisfaction of seeing him stir. A few drops more brought him up in a sitting posture; and yet a few more, and he was standing, supported by the arm of Guy and one of his brother keepers, and trying to walk. The shot had stunned him; but, though he bled profusely from innumerable wounds, he became himself satisfied in a short time that he was by no means as yet either a dead or a doomed man.

And now the question arose—what was to be

done with Guy? And, as a preliminary, another question was put to him:—

‘Who were the men with you?’

‘I’m not going to tell you.’

‘It’ll be worse for you if you don’t.’

‘Very well.’

‘Well, but,’ said the wounded man, who had been a little touched by what he had heard and witnessed of Guy’s behaviour, ‘you don’t mean to stick to a vagabond like that, who fired upon me when I was on the ground.’

‘Let’s go on,’ said Guy, and was silent from that time.

‘Well, I’ll tell you what I think’ll be best,’ said one of the keepers who seemed to be the head. ‘We’ll put Markam down at his own cottage, so that his wife may attend to him, and then, Bill, you and I will take this young spark over to Branhape.’

Guy heard the proposition with dismay.

‘No, no; not there; not before him!’ he urged.

‘And pray who asked your opinion?’

‘Well, come then, I’ll talk to you in a different way. I don’t want to evade the consequences of

to-night's work, and I think you may believe me when I say so.'

'Ay, ay; that's right enough.'

'Very well, then. I've been at the Hall under different circumstances, and—and—'

'All the better for you in the long run, even if it be a little unpleasant to begin with. Sorry I can't oblige you, but I must take you to Branhape, unless you like in preference to take yourself off home?'

'How?'

'Don't be a fool! You're a decent young chap, and may learn wisdom from to-night. I'll say this, although I've no right to say it, if you'll only just tell us the name of the man who fired the gun I'll promise you this whole business shall fall so lightly on you, you won't feel it. And, to begin with, I'll let you go home now—after you have told me—on your promising to meet me at Branhape when you're called for.'

Guy paused, and communed with himself a bit before he answered. He did not like going to Branhape; he would gladly have gone in any other direction to meet twice the pain or penalty. And,

then again, he was full of loathing at the conduct of his late companion, whom he had always fancied to be a good fellow enough at bottom, in spite of his occasional brutality of speech. He was not sure that the compact between them was not completely broken by such a deed of violence. In fine, he half convinced himself he might do what was desired without outraging the law of honour prevalent among such persons; but, even while he did so, he shrank only the more instinctively back to his former position of resistance

‘He is a vagabond, I own that, but I won’t do it. So I suppose we had better get on towards the Hall. It will be a pity to disturb them any later than we can help.’

CHAPTER IV.

LATE DISTURBERS.

MR. DALRYMPLE sat in what was called the 'blue drawing-room,' cosily enjoying his favourite supper—light sweet biscuits and wine; in front of him a magnificent hound lay at full length on the hearthrug; and by his side, on a low stool, sat Lucy, holding one of his hands, and singing in a low voice an old English ballad. After a day of hunting—for in spite of age, and increasing infirmities, he could not yet quite give up his pastime—after his day of hunting, through all which Lucy had been by his side—it was the squire's chief delight to have her again by his side at supper singing to him. He looked, as he was, happy. Her presence in his home had changed the old man's life. Past sorrows grew less painful in the remembrance; future life presented something to

interest him, were it only that her welfare had to be looked after.

It was already late—past midnight. Mrs. Hammett had gone to bed, at Lucy's kind suggestion, after having been caught yawning two or three times, while pretending to be not at all sleepy. And Mr. Pample — upon whom, in matters of business, the squire leaned more and more, and who had now for years almost lived at the Hall, instead of at his own house, a mile or so distant—had to-night retired early, to get through some business with a friend who was staying at the Hall for the night as his (Mr. Pample's) guest, by Mr. Dalrymple's express invitation.

And so, with all his business interests carefully guarded by his worthy steward—with all domestic matters efficiently and agreeably controlled by his genial, handsome, and kindly house-keeper—and all the deeper sympathies of his nature reposing on his charming niece—the squire felt to-night quite happy as he continued slowly to munch his biscuits and enjoyingly to sip his wine, and demand yet another ballad, till Lucy had

pretty well run the whole round ; when, to their surprise, they heard feet on the gravel outside the entrance porch, and immediately after there was a loud ring. In a minute or two a servant came in, saying to the squire,

‘The keepers have brought a poacher, sir. A man has been shot to-night, and the villains that did it have got away.’

‘H’m ! But you say they’ve got one ? Do you know who he is ?’

‘O yes, sir, I know very well. It’s Guy Waterman.’

‘Guy Waterman !’ The squire looked at Lucy, whose face had turned so appallingly white that he could not but notice the circumstance. Whatever he thought about the fact, it evidently excited his ire. ‘So,’ said he, aloud, ‘this is his reply to my warning to-day, is it ? Very well. We shall see. And why,’ said he to the servant, ‘did the men bring him here to-night ?’

‘Because, sir, they thought the attempt to murder one of the keepers was such a serious matter that something ought to be done at once.’

‘Quite right. And don’t they know the other men?’

‘No, sir; and this Guy, it seems, won’t tell. They’ve offered to let him go—for he warn’t so bad as the others—if he’d peach, but he wouldn’t.’

‘H’m! It’s very late. After all I don’t see what I can do to-night. I think, James, they’d better put him in the old lumber-room, and lock him up till morning. I dare say there’s a chair or couch in it that’ll do for him; if not, put something.’ Mr. Dalrymple sat down again looking gloomy and absent in mind, and Lucy reseated herself near him.

‘What does this young scapegrace mean by thrusting himself perpetually in my way, and apparently doing his utmost to annoy me? Well, he’s in for it now. I shall have to send him to gaol to-morrow, and when he comes out he won’t be improved. Devil take the fellow! I wish he’d emigrate. Poor Phœbe! I pity her from the very bottom of my soul. She worships him as though he were some divinity. She’ll be here to-morrow, and perhaps kill herself by leaving her

chamber in such a state. I wish to Heaven he had got away with the other rascals. I can't help respecting the chap's fidelity, even though it is but in favour of those abominable vagabond poachers. Well, let's go to bed, Lucy. Though they've settled all chance of sleep for me.' After kissing Lucy with a parent's fondness, he took a candle from her hand that she had lighted for him, said 'God bless you — good-night,' and left the drawing-room, supposing that Lucy was just about to follow his example and retire to bed. But she dropped back into a low arm-chair, and, covering her eyes with her hands, remained for a long time perfectly still; so still that but for the position of the hands she might have been supposed to be asleep. But suddenly she stood up, murmuring to herself,

'Yes, I must do it. I must do it.' Her face turned heavenwards, the lips moved as if in prayer or supplication, and the paleness began to be flecked with gleams of burning light that rapidly died out, and left her as before without one particle of colour in her cheeks.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. DALRYMPLE'S PICTURE.

WHEN the keepers, lighted and guided by the servant, had conducted Guy to the lumber-room he threw himself into the first chair that presented itself—a quaint, low, old-fashioned relic of a past age, and seemed to forget the very existence of his companions. They wished him good-night, but he made no reply, so they locked the door after him, and went away.

Guy saw the light disappear from under the door, heard their steps grow fainter and fainter, then, stretching out his legs at full length, and crossing his arms he sat motionless for a long time. But after giving way to this mood he rose hastily, and began to pace to and fro the room. As his eyes grew accustomed to the place he could distinguish its contents by the aid of the bright moon-

light that poured in through the large square architectural window. It was a large and lofty room, and had evidently at all times been a receptacle for the odds and ends of the house. Recently there seemed to have been a fresh influx of things, as though to get them out of other rooms that were for the time under repair or painting. Many pictures, for instance, were standing against the wall in their rich frames, with their faces turned away from observation, or that they might thus be better protected from accidental injury.

Guy went to the window, and looked out upon the rich verdure of the park, its gigantic pines feathered to the very ground, and its noble avenue, but the scene only reminded him of the adventures of the night, so he turned away. He went to the pictures and tilted them back one after another to see if he could get any amusement out of them, but a single look generally sufficed, and he had nearly exhausted the whole when one, a portrait, seemed to arrest his attention. He turned it round and tried to get a good view. He then lifted it in his arms, though the frame was large and

heavy, and carried it close to the window, where he stood it against the woodwork, and again tried to satisfy himself by a prolonged gaze. But the moonlight, though it shed an inexpressible softness and sweetness over the face—a woman's—that he looked on, was too weak to enable him to realize the exact features.

‘I wish I had a light!’ he exclaimed, impatiently. And then he suddenly remembered that he had his father's tinder-box and steel in his pocket, which he had on more than one occasion borrowed without Stephen's permission when going on poaching adventures. But what could he do without candle? Was there a piece anywhere upon that antiquated mantelpiece, or might there not be among all the sundries of furniture a candlestick or a pair of candlesticks with some wax yet remaining! He began to hunt, and though he was for a time unsuccessful, he did find at last a great branching candelabrum, with no less than six or seven stems, each furnished with a bit of wax candle at the bottom, the remains of a night of festal splendour.

‘Why, I can get up quite an illumination if I like,’ exclaimed Guy to himself, in good-humour at his success. But he contented himself with lighting one piece and sticking it on the arm of his chair. He then brought back the picture, placed another chair opposite his own, rested the picture against it, and sat down to have quite a luxurious bit of study—for Guy retained his boyish love of pictures.

He saw before him the portrait of a lady, not very young, but full of a strangely spiritual sweetness and melancholy. She seemed to look full at him, and he could scarcely resist the impression that he saw the tears gathering in her eyes. He tried to examine the details of the dress, to judge of the general effect of the picture, but always he found his gaze brought back and retained by her gaze, which seemed to penetrate him through and through. He shut his eyes, but on reopening them the effect was still the same. He got up, went to the window, and returned still to find the tender softness and irresistible pathos of those blue orbs fixed questioningly on him. He knew now who it

was—the squire's long-deceased lady—for he had seen the picture in the squire's study during that one happy night Guy had spent with him and Lucy when the latter had been first introduced to the Hall.

He sat down and began to recall all he had ever heard of the lady's sad story—of her sudden departure to prevent her child from being educated as a Protestant; of that child's death in sight of the English shore; of her own shipwreck and death at sea; and, looking thus upon her portrait, somehow Guy's own personal connection seemed to grow into sudden interest and importance. He remembered to have heard his mother say that the squire's lady was almost as fond of him, Guy, as of her own child; and, although he made large allowances for the peculiar mind of the speaker, Guy seemed to feel that there had been some tie of affection between him and this sweet, motherly woman whose gaze remained fixed on his so pertinaciously. One by one the incidents of the memorable voyage all rose up before his imagination and excited him till he began to wonder what was the matter with himself.

‘We were of the same age, it seems, within a few days; we went on the same voyage; we were suckled by the same breast; but then he died and I lived. Strange! Why should not he have lived and I have died? How much he had to live for—how little I! If he had lived how he must have worshipped such a mother as this! I know I should.

‘Poor squire, I wonder how he lived through it all—wife, son and heir, lost at a single blow! And my poor mother, I fancy, has never been the same woman since. I have often wondered at expressions of hers, and at her strange sadness at unexpected times. Can there have been any secret between her and this lady that was to be kept from the squire? But what could it be? It’s the worst of this kind of idle, vagabond life I’m leading that one’s always fancying romantic things have happened, or are going to happen, to prevent downright honest work. Ah, well; I’ve had enough of it. *She* shan’t tell me again, as she did yesterday, what sort of a son I am.’

Guy extinguished his light, and tried to settle

himself to sleep. But do what he would, his eye still sought, as if helplessly fascinated, the eyes of the picture, so melancholy, so sweet, and, above all, so full of questioning for him.

But at last he slept.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW GUY WAS AWAKENED.

WHATEVER might be the nature of Lucy's determination, she could not help pausing irresolutely more than once as she moved along the corridors, and on one of these occasions she seemed almost about to change her purpose, and take the usual direction towards her own chamber. The little candlestick and light that she held in one hand and with which she guided her uncertain steps quivered and shook, and sent startling gleams and shadows flickering ominously about before her in the way she was going. But still one thought continued to recur which drove her on in spite of the shrinkings of her nature from the task. At last she stopped at a door and looked eagerly to see if the key had been removed from the outside. No, it was there, and Lucy seemed to breathe more freely as she

saw it, and stood summoning up courage for what she had undertaken.

She grasped the key and tried to turn it in the lock without noise, and she succeeded in fact, though to herself the slight click of the bolt as it was shot back seemed almost as loud as the report of a pistol. She stood a very picture of innocence playing at guilt, trembling like a leaf in the wind, as she reflected both as to what he might think who was inside, or as to what others in the house might think if they saw her thus engaged.

Afraid to tap, afraid to bring him to the door to speak to her where they might be seen, she entered noiselessly. The place seemed all dark, for the moon had passed temporarily behind a thick cloud. And at first she could not see Guy. She held her light aloft and tried to make out his position, but some furniture interposed. She advanced, and felt her heart almost stop as she saw him asleep in his chair, his head fallen back, and his long hair falling picturesquely about. Lucy saw the picture before him. She saw he had been admiring it, and had fallen asleep apparently while studying it by

the light of the moon. Lucy drew near. She felt now for the first time courage to look at this young man, who, she could not conceal from herself, interested her only too deeply. There was quite a new expression on the face. It might have been some kind of subtle reflection from the picture, if such an effect were possible. There was the same melancholy sweetness in both. And to Lucy there was something inexpressibly touching to see this young man, whom of late she had only known as reserved, haughty even in his vagabond life, and at times scornful, now evidently moved to almost womanly tenderness by the contemplation of the fair but sorrowful face of the squire's deceased lady. Under Guy's long eyelashes she saw there were tears not yet dried. Had they come in sleep, or previously? Lucy asked herself, but, of course, was unable to answer.

She did not like to wake him. Shall we confess it, Lucy felt a dangerous pleasure in thus being able to watch him, herself the while utterly unobserved. It might be the last time she might ever again see him. It *must* be the last time in which

she could allow herself to indulge in the vague fancies that his presence awoke in her breast. The very safety of the present moment (as it seemed), however, created a new danger. Guy, though sleeping, was not mentally at rest. He began to move uneasily in his chair; to moan; to grow excited; wild words of anger and struggle broke from him. Every instant Lucy expected to see his eyes open upon hers; and she was now again trembling with the burden of her own thoughts, and with the sense of the peculiar responsibilities she was incurring. But Guy's soul rested awhile in its work of retracing the excitements of the day. A sudden smile of strange sweetness and power burst out, and the listener heard with emotion her own name just murmured.

‘Lucy!’

A burning blush overspread Lucy's cheek, and she prayed that he would not wake at that moment, would not be able to see her as she then was. She glided back some distance, put the candle down on the floor behind an old cabinet where its feeble light was lost in the brilliant glory of the moon, which

was again pouring into the room ; and there Lucy stood, in listening hesitation. But the delay did not improve matters. Again she heard him murmuring in low, deep, earnest, but also broken tones, words and phrases that she could only half understand. Then there was a pause—a deep silence—and then he was awake and speaking in low self-communing tones, as if continuing unconsciously in the same track of thought as that of his dreams:—

‘ No, she shan’t know. She shall never know what’s made me waste my life hanging about here ; she shan’t know that it’s because I must see her sometimes, if but for a minute, only but for a minute. No, no ; it would be too base, even if —’

Lucy had not much family pride, but she understood well enough the misery that might be involved in what she had discovered—that Guy Waterman loved her—her, Lucy Dalrymple. Yes ; she knew well what a hopeless and miserable love it might be, and her heart did not feel one thrill of triumph or gratified vanity at the sense of having fascinated

such a strange wild nature as Guy's. It only ached with pity for him—true womanly pity; and if she could have plucked that fatal love out of him, as she had once plucked a wasp's sting from his hand, she would have done it.

But she told herself that the only way thenceforward to lessen and shorten Guy's trouble, was so to guard her every look and word that he should take no false hope from her behaviour. And this she determined with all her heart to do, for his sake and for her own.

Under this new feeling, Lucy softly took up the candle, tapped on the opened door, as if newly entering, and advanced. Guy started to his feet and gazed in boundless astonishment upon the figure before him with the tremulous light in one of its hands.

'Miss Dalrymple!' he exclaimed, after having quite satisfied himself that he was not still pursuing the exciting track of his dream.

'Yes! Do not be surprised. My uncle is grieved at your being in this position; and would, I am sure, be glad if you were to get away unknown

to him. 'Yes,' said Lucy, observing a dubious smile cross Guy's face, 'I know he thinks so, because he said as much, not, of course, intending anyone else to know. But he will do his duty. To-morrow—to—'

'I shall be in gaol—yes, I know,' quietly and bitterly interposed Guy, seeing that she hesitated to pronounce the word.

'Had I told him,' continued Lucy, and again her tell-tale cheek began to suggest that personal thoughts were at work within, 'he would not, of course, have permitted me to do this. I had no choice, therefore, but to—to—to—to—'

'I understand, and thank you, Miss Dalrymple. Yes, I perfectly understand that for Mr. Dalrymple's sake alone you do this, and that you naturally desire that I shall not—that no one in my position should—venture to suppose you capable of taking all this trouble at so late an hour for anyone but him.'

For a moment Lucy's cheek burned with a glow from a different source as she heard her secret thoughts and wishes so cruelly, almost brutally, misunderstood. But she reflected before speaking

the words that sprung to her lips, and in that brief space she partly understood the meaning of Guy's severe tone—her own peremptory and seemingly harsh manner. Like many other good people engaged in doing a good thing, Lucy forgot for the moment that the goodness was peculiarly liable to be mistaken by the object of it, and to put him into anything but a grateful frame of mind.

Nor did she improve matters when, seeing her error, she tried to undo it by a marked display of sudden kindness, almost sisterly in its earnestness. Guy thought this only a change from aristocratic hauteur to aristocratic condescension or aristocratic benevolence; anyhow, he felt indisposed to accept the kindness offered, and so, after a brief and painful pause, he astonished Lucy by saying,

‘I don't want to go, thank you. I'm just as likely to get into mischief again. Gaol has no particular terrors for me; and while I'm there Mr. Dalrymple will at least know I'm safe, and not likely to disturb him or his for some time to come.’

Lucy looked perplexed and angry. What was she to do? To beg him to go as a personal

favour? She could not hear his frequent allusions to her uncle without a feeling of mingled pain and resentment. Guy no longer seemed to cherish his old sentiment of love and admiration for the squire—a love and admiration that would, under different circumstances—as, for instance, in the battle-field—have made him one of the old man's most devoted followers. The life of the last year or two, so aimless, and so often bringing him into collision with the squire's most cherished prejudices as a sportsman and a magistrate; and that under-current towards herself of which Lucy had long suspected the existence, but now knew the reality, had seriously changed the relations between Guy and his godfather; and Lucy began to look with alarm on the results. But she had already seen enough of Guy to know that, if it was difficult to guide, it was impossible to drive him. He must leave the Hall. But how was it to be managed, unless she were herself to persuade him?

Knowing it would be useless to appeal to him on his own account, she reminded him of his mother. But whether it was that Guy knew he was there on

weak ground, or that he did not choose to let his thoughts regarding his mother, for whom he had a deep affection, be looked into, he kept a stubborn silence to all Lucy's remarks on that head; and, indeed, seemed almost to be growing pleased at last by Lucy's increasing earnestness and self-forgetfulness, since they made her so demonstrative towards him.

And Lucy before long found the tone of their conversation changing insensibly into a settled and unmistakable determination on his part apparently to make her say something which she had resolved not to say, and to a resistance on hers which grew weaker and weaker as her thoughts grew more and more confused in the difficulty of her task.

'You will not, then, go for the sake of the squire, who has done you so many acts of kindness, now that you know he wishes you to go?'

'No; when I'm his prisoner I'm not going to steal away in the night, just because I've got the chance.'

'Not for your mother's sake, Guy Waterman? Think how bitterly she will feel it.'

Guy shook his head.

‘Not for your father’s, of whose credit you were so very careful this morning?’

Guy laughed bitterly, as he replied,

‘For his sake? I’ve not given him much reason to care about what becomes of me. The farther I’m off the better he’ll be pleased.’

‘Then for no one, for no motive, will you relieve us all from the shame and misery your staying here will involve?’

‘Shame for me, and misery and shame too, perhaps, for my mother; but not for Mr. Dalrymple or for you.’

Lucy set the candle down upon an old broken harpsichord, and stood irresolute a minute. Then she glanced towards the door, and Guy said to himself, with a throb of pain, ‘she is going;’ but while he sat looking down on the floor in his listless obstinate mood, she turned round to him with a sudden passion of tears,—

‘Oh, Guy, Guy, you are hard of heart! you are cruelly hard!’ she cried. ‘If I must say do it for my sake I will say it; but it—it is not generous; it is not manly to make me do so.’

Guy raised his head and looked at her with an incredulous stare, then a half cry broke from him, and he buried his face in his hands. Lucy stood trembling from head to foot, and crying to herself, 'Oh, what have I said? what have I said?' for there sat Guy before her, with his face in his hands, and tears trickling between his brown fingers.

But while she stood watching him, and feeling (in spite of all her pity) half inclined to hurry away, Guy rose up and came towards her, and directly she looked at his face she ceased to tremble, and a weakness and awe stole over her. Again she asked herself, 'what had she said?' but this time with sorrowful regret and a little shame. Through the passionate love that she saw in Guy's face, as he approached her, there shone such a sweet and gentle courtesy that she said to herself with anguish, 'How have I been treating this man? As my inferior? It seems to me now I am in the presence of one infinitely above me; in the presence of a spirit of such chivalry and true nobleness as I have only dreamed of—never met—never till now.'

When Guy spoke—extreme emotion recalling the

rough workman phrase—there was the strong deep music of manly love in his voice—a music that was utterly new to Lucy's soul, and therefore very wonderful and glorious, and in listening to it, and receiving in her pure eyes Guy's gaze, she forgot everything else, everything in the world.

‘My life has been very dark,’ said Guy; ‘very dark and profitless until to-night, but I am not going to tell you what has made it so, Miss Dalrymple. It's enough that it isn't dark any longer; that it shan't be profitless any longer; and when I say that you need not take fright at my words, nor think I'd be such a fool or such a scoundrel as to go building on what you've said, or hoping anything, for I won't; I swear to you I won't. You've asked me to save myself from the shame of going where, if I stayed here, I should go to-morrow. You have asked me to do it for your sake, and for your sake I will do it. I will go—go, with God's help, to make my life what a man's life ought to be when one like you, Lucy Dalrymple, has asked him to keep it from shame for her sake. That's all the use I'll make of your words, so you needn't begrudge them to me.

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If I get to hate my work again, as I have hated it, I'll remember to-night, and say, "for her sake," and then, instead of seeing only common hard wood to toil over, I shall recollect that leaves and flowers have grown out of it—that fruit has grown out of it before, and that I can make fruit grow out of it again. "For her sake" I shall say, and I'd like to see the nail that'll stand against my hammer then. "For her sake!" Oh! Lucy, Lucy! They may put me to work in the coal-pits if they like, and keep me from the daylight for weeks and weeks, they couldn't make my life dark any more, nor shut beauty away from me. As I lifted my pickaxe I should say, "for her sake," and the place would have no horrors for me. "She is of the earth, and the earth is good; strike deep and bring out the treasures of the earth," *for her sake*. Lucy, may I do this? May I? or will your pride feel hurt from such a one as I being so near to you in thought, though in reality so far away.'

'My pride?' said Lucy, bending down her head and sobbing as she spoke. 'It seems to me, Guy Waterman, that unless you wish to make my pride

too great for me to be able to perform the duties of my life, you had better say no more ; but go—go and let me go, and pray for you and for myself, that I may be more like what you think me ; more worthy of such a friend.'

Smiling sweetly through her tears, she held out her hand to Guy. He looked down with misty eyes at the little childish hand lying in his own brown one, and there bent and kissed it tenderly, with hot quivering lips.

A moment more, and he was hurrying from the room.

'Stop!' cried Lucy. Guy paused. 'There is only one way in which you can get out of the house unnoticed—through the steward's room. There is a window there that opens on an external staircase. He and his friend must have gone to bed long before this. Be on your guard ; I will take you to the door.'

Putting her finger on her lip to warn him to silence, Lucy then, with her other hand, raised the light to show him the way ; but, while he thought only of her, and watched only her, as she moved,

his foot tripped against the woodwork of the threshold. She caught his hand to save him from falling ; and when she found he did not afterwards let it go, she resigned herself to its gentle pressure, though her very pulse seemed to throb as with a new life from his pulse : and thus their hands remained locked together during their brief walk.

Brief, indeed ! Guy would have been glad if it might never have ended. He seemed to be pouring forth to her in those eventful instants all the long-hoarded secrets of his life, his wasted years, his indolence, his follies, his bad companions. Thus, and thus only, could he say how deeply, how passionately, he loved her. How he had gone on loving her year by year, with ever-increasing intensity and secret devotion, from the time of their first meeting. And he could not but feel she was answering him ; that she sympathized so far as she dared with his love ; that she was assuring him by that sweet consent of hand that he had not mistaken her first impetuous gush of wounded feeling when she found that he would not consent to go away at any less a price than some sort of acknowledgment from her. Ah, yes ! through

many a weary day, through many a bitter trial, the remembrance of this midnight walk through the corridors of Branhape, hand in hand, will cheer and solace these young hearts.

And there were sweet and mutual experiences forced upon them in their walk. Once they heard a door opening somewhere in the distance, and Lucy, veiling her light, drew him back for a moment into a little recess, while they waited and listened. What delight it was to Guy to share her fear, to listen as she listened, to gaze as she gazed doubtfully along the echoing corridor in fear of the approaching form, which turned off in good time, to smile back an answer to her smile as she looked again in his face to intimate they might proceed.

But the door is reached at last. Guy understands too well why she pauses. Again he kisses the unreluctant hand; then it is snatched from him, and a fast foot flies along the corridor, bearing the dear form to a place where it can give unrestrained way to the emotions of sadness and delight, of wonder and of doubt, that the night had called forth. 'Had she said too much, permitted too

much?' was the question of one minute. 'Could it be true that it was all love for her—deep, passionate, but secret and hopeless love—which had so clouded his faculties and spoilt his career?' was the inquiry of the next. And then the very fact that she had nothing to fear from him—that he had exacted nothing from her, even under all this love—made her only the more willing to dwell on the fact of his love, as if in mere sympathy with him; and so she could not but drink in the delicious but dangerous draught offered to her lips. Could Guy have known but some of the fancies that passed through the pure and maidenly brain that night under the guardianship of sleep, we doubt whether his heroic resolves would have proved quite as strong as he intended they should be.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. PAMPLE'S ROOM.

GUY paused for a moment or two looking after Lucy's retreating figure, and the faint light that it carried, with emotions that almost unfitted him for any immediate contact with the world. Something of exquisite beauty and value seemed to have been his for a brief moment, and then to have vanished for ever. He yearned to cry out to her to stay yet longer; he would have liked again to try to say to her some one of the innumerable things that he had been vainly struggling to give expression to. He had almost begun to doubt whether he had done wisely to accept with such utter unreserve the idea of absolute separation in the future. Everything about and within him seemed but a chaos; all life henceforward but a prolonged misery, wanting Lucy's presence and love.

But Guy wrestled with his madness and depression. He acknowledged he had done only that which was right, and which he must do again if any repetition were necessary. And even then, amid all the exquisite pain of the process, he felt he would gladly go through it once more in return for the still more exquisite delight of holding Lucy's hand in the silent walk through the corridor, when (he felt sure of it)—when heart had spoken most eloquently to heart, though tongues were necessarily mute.

But Guy was yet in the house, and he must get out of it. Now, at all events, for Lucy's sake, there must be no question of his getting safely away. So he must forget her for a moment, the better to recollect and fulfil her request to him. He must put aside his enthralling dreams, and wake for a short time to actual life and possible adventure. He listened before opening the door, and was surprised that he had not previously noticed the voices within. The fact told him how absorbed he had been. But now he listened intently. There were two voices—no doubt those of Mr. Pample

and his friend. Guy fancied they were not in the first room, for the voices sounded distant. So he ventured to open the door. The voices went on. He looked in. He saw nothing but a large room with a bay window at the farther extremity, through which came the faint moonlight, whilst on the left a stream of artificial radiance came through a narrow opening and stretched far across the floor. No doubt it was through the slightly-opened door of the inner room that the ray came. The voices went on as Guy advanced softly into the first room, closing the door behind him, and looked to see whether he could be seen from the second, as he passed towards the window, outside of which was the staircase he must reach. He could evidently pass in safety, provided only the speakers did not overhear him, and that no accident caused one or both to come to the outer room while he was making his transit. He moved on a pace or two, then stopped as if rooted to the spot, forgetting his own position, his danger, and everything else in the one idea—Lucy! Yes, they were talking of Miss Dalrymple.

In vain he strove to catch the next few sentences,

and yet he heard words and phrases that rendered it impossible for him to pass on. He drew nearer to the door, holding his breath nervously. He reached it and stood with his ear to the narrow opening. Looking round, he saw that in case either of the persons within should move there was a bookcase close by, behind the end of which he might conceal himself, if only his presence were not suspected. He now found he could hear occasionally what passed with tolerable distinctness. We give the reader the whole of the conversation, of which Guy thus caught but part:—

‘Yes, as I was telling you,’ said the steward, ‘the squire wants to buy a more valuable estate nearer home, to give to his adopted daughter before an event, the nature of which I need not suggest.’

‘The young lady has found a lover and an intended husband already, has she?’

‘No, I do not *say* that.’ There was an emphasis on the *say* that only gave a deeper impression that Mr. Pample meant it, whether he said it or not. ‘No, I do not say that; but I can foresee. There have been little attentions, and they were evidently

not disagreeable. There have been inquiries—I myself have been spoken to—and the answers were of course eminently satisfactory. She is the squire's heiress. But, however, this is not our business. I only mention it to show you why the squire does what I never knew him do before, mortgage one of his estates, this large outlying estate, which he does not need to sell. A few years will enable us to pay off the mortgage. Too soon for you, I doubt not.'

'Ah, yes, I see! And of course he does not care to have such a thing known when he does do it.'

'Exactly. Not only for his own sake, but for hers. He will surprise her some day. Well, I think we have nearly done. He has signed, as you see, in my presence and in the presence of one of the servants whom I often employ in little matters of business, leases, &c.'

'I need not tell you, Mr. Pample, that it is usual in affairs of this nature and magnitude to see the principal himself—'

'Certainly! and if you like to wait till to-mor-

row you shall do so, and he can retrace his signature before you.'

'Well, no. I don't think that that is necessary. Everybody knows you, Mr. Pample, and the confidence the squire reposes in you.'

'Well, but if you like—'

'No ; I think the document is sufficient.

'Very well ; I will now say what I did not choose to mention before ; and that is, that if you had insisted upon seeing him, he would have been very likely to have torn up the deed, and said he had altered his mind. He's very short and sudden, if offended. The fact is, he hates borrowing money, even for such a purpose as this ; but if he had to talk about it to strangers he would possibly fall back upon his pride, and refuse to go on with the affair.'

'I am glad, then, 'tis so settled. And I am much obliged to you, Mr. Pample, for putting so good a thing in our way.'

'Well, you know I have no interest in the business, but my employer's.'

'No, no, of course not. But I hope, now that all

is settled, you will permit me to make you some acknowledgment.'

'It is not my custom, Mr. Stanford, to permit anything of the kind.'

'No, no, I am quite sure of that. But as my partners attach no ordinary value to this introduction, which may possibly pave the way for other transactions, and as you have selected us solely with a view to the interest of your employer, it is natural that we should wish to express what we feel, and, in any case, trust you will not be offended.'

'Oh, certainly not. Perhaps you may some day be able to repay me any slight service I have rendered you.'

'I am happy to hear you say so. We shall be only too glad when you give us the opportunity. There, then, is the cheque on the Bank of England, 16,500l.'

'Please to cross it with the name of our bank, so that the whole transaction may be regular. We must be regular in such matters, Mr. Stanford, even if, in condescension to our employer's little amiable weaknesses, we are secret.'

‘There, then, it is. And now suppose we drink a health to the young lady, and her happy marriage.’

‘Which, of course, means for her a distinguished marriage.’

‘Of course.’

‘Not only wealth, Mr. Stanford, but rank.’

‘Ah, indeed! I am delighted to hear it.’

‘But I say nothing. Please to remember that, Mr. Stanford. It will be yet some time probably before a single living person will know anything beyond the young lady herself—the fortunate man—and her guardian.’

‘And her guardian’s guardian, if I may be excused a joke! Eh!’

‘Ah, well, we *do* take care of our gentlemen, Mr. Stanford, or Heaven knows what would become of them. Yes, I dare say, I shall not be the last to be taken into confidence when there is anything to confide.’

‘Now, then, Mr. Pample, I drink to the health, happiness, and prosperity of Miss Dalrymple, and may she make a marriage worthy of her.’

‘She cannot go beyond that, I am sure,’ said Mr. Pample, as he repeated the words of the toast.

And Guy heard them clink their glasses together in a sort of jovial, noiseless way of doing the honours, and he heard the accompanying laugh, and the moving of the chairs, as though for departure, so he thought it was high time to look to his own movements. He slipped behind the place of shelter he had marked out. The door opened. Mr. Pample came first, with a candle in his hand, saying to his companion,

‘I must return back to set things to rights before going to bed ; so I’ll show you your dormitory first.’

Had either of the two, as they passed toward the door of the outer room, looked steadily at the place where Guy crouched behind the bookcase, it was just possible the concealed listener would have been detected ; for Guy, however much he shrunk into himself and drew back, could still see them ; but Mr. Pample alone glanced round, and that with so absent an eye, and the one candle he

carried diffused so little light through that large room, that Guy remained undiscovered.

As soon as they had left the room Guy stepped forwards into the inner room, moved by some impulse he hardly understood, and looked upon the table where the two speakers had been seated. He saw merely decanters with wine, spirits, and glasses, a single candle, and a number of papers lying confusedly about on the table. He took up some of the documents. He glanced at one piece of paper that dropped out from among them. It seemed full of calculations; but otherwise of no value: it was evidently a mere memorandum. The total amount arrested his eye, 16,500*l.*, the very amount of his cheque.

‘How odd!’ thought Guy. ‘Why, he said it was to buy an estate with for her.’ He began to read,—‘Interest of G.’s bonds?’ Why, what has that to do with buying an estate? Was he lying? If so, for what purpose? They can’t, I suppose, hang me for stealing this,’ he said, with a laugh, as he folded up the paper. ‘Nor, I suppose, for this!’ and he poured out and drank a glass of the

wine. 'I am faint, and must trespass on the squire's hospitality so far. Now then to get away—and then—to reflect on what I have heard. Unless, indeed, I cut short all further reflection by dropping as I pass into the squire's fish-pond, which is deep enough, I suppose, to do the business. I wonder what she'd think to see me fished up there one day?'

Guy laughed as he went towards the bay window, opened a little door by its side, got out upon a landing that led by a short gallery to a staircase, which he rapidly descended, and thence along a part of the basement of the house, whence he struck across into the park.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. PAMPLE MADE UNCOMFORTABLE.

WHEN Mr. Pample returned to the room after seeing his friend comfortably disposed of for the night, he seemed for a time to be very thoughtful, a little sad, and not exactly at his ease. The familiar smile had not only vanished from his face, but had left behind a something so different that the suggestion would have been forced upon an observer that the habit of smiling was only kept up at a heavy cost upon the spirits. He returned to his seat, poured out a glass of wine, looked about him in an indifferent manner—first at one object in the room, then another—as if trying to throw off thoughts for the night; and then suddenly, in a nervous and impulsive way, gulped down the contents of the glass.

But the thoughts that pressed in upon his brain

would not be put off, even though quiet and sleep might be very necessary to strengthen that brain for its future work. Presently, Mr. Pample rose, and paced to and fro the room, and, as he did so, his reflections ran something like the following :—

‘I wish I could have avoided this. My first plan was a safer one if it had but worked. If the old fellow had married Mrs. Hammett, and died off, as I felt sure he would soon after, and left all his property to her, I think I could have persuaded her a second time a little more successfully than I did the first. But I don’t renounce the scheme even yet. If I could but get this girl out of the way—married—he’d again feel his loneliness; and then, if threatened with the loss of Mrs. Hammett, would probably, in despair, induce her to stay by an offer of marriage. But this promises nothing at present. No; but if it enables me by-and-by to extricate myself when things get to a magnitude that may otherwise be too much for me to cope with I shall be quite content. Meantime, I am committed. Yes, this affair’s done, and can’t be undone. That’s certain. Let me see.

Could I, if I were inclined, even yet make all things as they were a few hours ago? I might, perhaps, by some pecuniary sacrifices—something in the form of a gift from the squire, to accompany the return of the cheque, in consideration of the giving up of the mortgage. But would the holder believe me! Would not so remarkable an occurrence make him at once divine the truth—that the whole affair was a secret business of my own, and that something had suddenly frightened me out of my purpose?

‘ Besides, what idle and weak stuff all this is now. Involved as I am, where am I to find means to make any such gift? Above all, how else can I make so many payments as must be made to keep off discovery? Why, then, do I now ask such questions? I cannot tell. I am not much given to superstitious fancies, yet somehow, since the whole thing has been so successfully gone through, I have a sort of creeping fear come over me, some instinct that says it would be worth all the world to me to be able successfully to go back. But can I? Can I in any less dangerous mode cope with my

difficulties? Let me see—where is that memorandum I made of things that must be paid to stave off discovery?’

Mr. Pample put his fingers nervously into his waistcoat pocket, and yet seemed surprised that he did not find there what he sought. He turned the lining inside out. There was nothing in it. His face visibly paled; his manner grew disturbed; he moved with hurried step to the table and rummaged all the papers over. Still in vain. He now searched all his other pockets, though muttering to himself the while,

‘I am sure I did not put it into any of them. No; I must have dropped it from my waistcoat pocket, or I must, while talking, have forgotten myself and used it for some purpose or other. Let me think. Did I or did he make a light of it for the wax when the seals were affixed? No doubt that’s it. But can I be sure?’

Mr. Pample went to the fireplace and found the half-burned piece of paper that he had referred to: he opened it; it was not the paper he sought.

His emotion increased, though he tried by pressing

both his cold hands upon his heated brow to calm himself.

‘I must return to his bedchamber and see if I have dropped it there, or on the way. But what excuse? It would be madness to set him thinking. If he has the paper it must be in some accidental way, and he may think nothing of it even if he looks at it. But, curses on my folly! the items there just run up to the 16,500*l.* received, and if he has a grain of sense he must see that they cannot be such as I might have to pay for the squire; or, if they are, then he must see that the squire’s position is different from what the world supposes it to be, and from that which I have described; and the doubt would lead him to make inquiries that would be ruinous.

‘Ha! my old luck has not yet deserted me! He has left a glove. This will be an excuse for my hurrying back.’ Mr. Pample took the glove and one of the table lights and retraced his steps, looking with the greatest care at every inch of the floor in front of him and on either side. Then he went into and through the corridor, up a staircase,

and then, quite without success, he reached the door he sought. He knocked.

‘Who’s there?’

‘I, Mr. Pample. You have left something behind you.’

‘Oh! come in. I am in bed.’

Exactly what Mr. Pample wished. He opened the door, and, on the pretence of a stumble at the moment of entrance, he picked his steps with apparent caution, holding down the light till he reached the dressing-table, saying aloud as he moved,

‘It’s only your glove; but, as you are leaving early in the morning, I thought you might be inconvenienced by its absence or loss.’

‘Oh, thank you! Please to put it on the table.’

Mr. Pample did so, and searchingly looked there, too, for his lost paper. Still in vain. One only thing remained; to judge, by a good look at the gentleman who lay in bed, if his countenance suggested that he had found anything of moment—a bold thing to do; but Mr. Pample was growing desperate.

‘Well, another shake of the hand, and good-night!’ exclaimed Mr. Pample, with his sweetest smile, as he went towards the bed with the candle in his left hand.

‘Good-night, and thank you! I was fast asleep,’ said the gentleman laughingly, as he rubbed his eyes and put out his hand.

And so they parted.

‘He knows nothing,’ said Mr. Pample to himself, as he went away.

When he got back to his inner room he sat on the edge of the table, gloomy, restless, baffled, yet, on the whole, inclined to believe he was needlessly alarming himself. He began to recall, in order, all he could remember about the accursed paper.

‘I had it, I know, just before the servant brought him into the room, and I thought I had hurried it into my waistcoat-pocket. But I have now a half-impression that I slipped it under the papers where I sat.’

Again Mr. Pample examined all the papers, opening those that were folded, shaking them even when at fullest extension, and only ceased his quest

when it became morally impossible that the paper he sought could be anywhere on the table. He next dived into the waste-paper basket. He knew he had a habit when thinking of tearing up pieces of paper, and though he did not remember ever having so torn documents of the slightest value, yet he might, in the serious business of to-night, have forgotten himself. He took out bit after bit from the top of the heap in the basket (which was about half full), and though it soon became evident that no fragment was there of the kind he sought, he went on with exemplary patience till he had taken out and looked at the very last morsel.

‘Well,’ thought he, after another long and gloomy pause, ‘I must acknowledge it will serve me right if I am ruined by such an act of insane carelessness. But if it is not now here, which it certainly is not, and if Stanford has not taken it up, which is very unlikely, what other conclusion remains? Ha! Is it possible there has been a secret listener?’

Mr. Pample paused as he looked down the horrible vista now opened before his eyes. A cold

sweat bedewed his face, his hand trembled, and he glanced onwards towards the darkness of the outer room, and the door near the bay-window by which Guy had made his escape.

‘But what a fool I am to harass myself in this way. What reason have I to suppose that anyone could have been here unknown to me, or that anyone can have wished to be here secretly? Stay, there was a ring at the bell, I remember, while I was engaged with him over the mortgage. Would it be worth while to see if either of the servants are yet up and can tell me who that was? Scarcely. No, I think not. And yet I will.’

He went to a bell and rang it with unusual gentleness, so that it might only be heard by the servants if any of them were up. He waited some time in silence. At last a footman came.

‘Not in bed yet, William?’

‘No, sir; I thought you and the gentleman might, perhaps, want me.’

‘Very kind of you to think of us. Who was it that rang the bell in the porch two or three hours ago?’

‘The keepers with a poacher. There’s been blood shed to-night, so they brought him to master. It’s that young Waterman.’

‘Indeed! Phoebe’s son! Ah! that young vagabond ’ll come to no good. Did the squire see him?’

‘No, sir, it was too late. He told us to put the young man into the lumber-room, as a prisoner till the morning.’

‘And he’s there now? Is he locked in?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Ah! very well. Good-night! I shall want nothing more.’

‘Good-night, sir.’

As William went out Mr. Pample began to think to himself—‘Can this youth—this Guy Waterman—have been here? Not unless he were escaping. And yet, if he did but know it, this would be the very way for him to get out safely, if he could get as far as my room. I’ve a good mind to see if he is still there where they say they left him.’

Mr. Pample took up a light, and went off

towards a different part of the building. He had not to wait till he reached the door of the lumber-room to discover that the bird had flown. He saw a long way off that the door was open; for neither Guy nor Lucy, in the deep preoccupation of their hearts, had been able or inclined to think of any plans for deceiving those who might subsequently come in search of the prisoner.

Mr. Pample hurried into the room—looked hastily all over it—convinced himself it was empty—picked up a handkerchief edged with lace, and bearing in the corner the name of Lucy—and knew at once the hand that had set the prisoner free.

This was indeed a startling discovery, and for a few moments Mr. Pample was overpowered by the many and strange prospects it opened. Had Mr. Dalrymple himself directed Lucy to perform this delicate task? If so it must mean that he had a great dislike to proceedings against Guy, and yet did not see how to evade them except by assisting Guy to escape. And if that were the truth he would naturally wish no one to know except a person in whose secrecy and devotion he might rely.

Lucy would undoubtedly be that person. And then the squire would not thank Mr. Pample to busy himself about the escape.

But what if this were the young lady's own doing, and that her act was altogether unknown to her uncle? Mr. Pample found the hypothesis so agreeable that he could not but pursue it. 'Yes,' thought he, 'if that be the case it implies a great deal more. She must care for him very much, and may possibly be drawn into a match with him. I wish I saw how to help her. That would wonderfully quicken all my projects. The squire would never forgive such a marriage, and would be more than ever dependent on Mrs. Hammett's kindness—and my own.

'Yes; but has this young vagabond got hold of my paper? He has escaped. Did he escape through my room? If so—' Mr. Pample had not courage yet to face the conclusion, but went back to see if he could discover any trace of Guy's having passed through his (Mr. Pample's room) to the external staircaise. The door, as he remembered well, he had locked the previous evening, for he also remembered having speculated as to the possibility of

prudently locking the outer door of his room while the stranger was present on such business, but had rejected the thought, seeing how impossible it would have been to explain the circumstance if anyone had discovered the door to be thus fastened ; and relying on the invariable habit of everyone who came to him of knocking at the door before entering. And now, perhaps, some one had stolen in during the proceedings, watched all, taken off the piece of paper by way of proof, and got out by the door to the outside staircase. When Mr. Pample himself got to that door he was in such a state of nervous excitement that he was obliged to pause for an instant in order that he might afterwards be quite sure of the accuracy of the report given to his senses. The key was in the lock just as he had left it, but was the door still fastened ? He tried it, opened it, felt the cold rush of the early morning air, and seemed to hear in it a voice—

‘ You are discovered ! ’

Guy flew across the park as if pursued by some evil spirit. The news he had heard with regard to

Lucy almost maddened him. If that were true, what delusion must she not have practised upon him; unless, indeed, it was he who, by his own egotistic folly, had deluded himself!

In this mood it seemed to him more and more probable that her kindness had been prompted by a purely friendly feeling, that she had early penetrated his secret, been moved by it, but had not known how to put an end to his dream till the circumstances of the past night, and Guy's own conduct had aided her.

Well, bitter as that thought was, it was less dreadful than would have been the thought of her being deficient either in truthfulness or purity. But was the story true? Mr. Pample, an old and most thoroughly-trusted servant of the family, was exactly the man to know before any other person the real views of the squire and of the young lady on such a subject. What motive could he have for speaking untruly upon it, and to a stranger?

At first Guy had, in the generous confidence of his young, ardent, and self-sacrificing love, felt in-

instinctively it was not true, and that some motive must exist for the invention of the lie. He disliked Mr. Pample ; perhaps because the latter had never participated in the kindly feeling that most of the inmates of the Hall had felt and shown for the son of Phœbe Waterman in remembrance of the story of their deceased lady. And when Guy had taken advantage of the absence of Mr. Pample and his friend, after the termination of their business together, to secrete a piece of paper, he did it with an instinctive feeling that he might have to declare what he had heard, and that some proof of his presence might be necessary.

Young as Guy was in years, his peculiar life had made him secretly thoughtful, had enriched his knowledge of men, and developed the powers of a naturally rich intellect. Phœbe had managed, with Mr. Dalrymple's aid, to keep him at school till he was fourteen ; and when Guy wished his master 'Good-by !' on his last visit, the master had told him he was 'the first boy in his school,' and he hoped he 'would know how to use his many advantages.'

Guy was now to be severely tried. As he crossed at daybreak the limits of the squire's estate, and got on to the common, he threw himself down under a hedge to reflect upon the topics we have mentioned. After a while he remembered the paper with figures : he took it crumpled from his pocket, smoothed it out on his knee, and looked at it. He read—

Interest of G.'s Bonds . . .	£250	0	0
Dividends, Long An. . .	310	0	0
„ Consuls . . .	239	0	0
Calls on Canal Sh. . .	1,140	0	0
Def. in B.	9,540	0	0
	<hr/>		
	£11,479	0	0
Reserve for Spec.	5,021	0	0
	<hr/>		
	£16,500	0	0

Of course the paper puzzled Guy. He was a long time before he could make anything out of it. But by degrees he saw that Long An. meant probably the Long Annuities, and his master had explained the Funds to him when recommending Guy to get into a merchant's or banker's office. He had heard, too, that many gentlemen had put a deal of money into Canal Shares. But what could 'Def. in B.' mean? Before he got to any answer on that

head he was again more and more struck by the fact that the sum total was exactly the same as the amount of the cheque he had heard discussed, and which he knew had been given. This paper, then, was apparently Mr. Pample's memorandum as to the disposal of the large sum just received. But, looking at it in that light, several things puzzled him strangely. Had Mr. Dalrymple other bonds out—'G.'s'—on which interest must be paid? It seemed to Guy that he had overheard Mr. Pample suggest the very contrary. But the dividends? Dividends, Guy fancied, were moneys received by gentlemen of funded property. How, then, came they here as payable, for clearly the paper was one of projected payments? Guy began to grow hot and uncomfortable at his own ugly thoughts. How could the squire have to pay these two sums for dividends? He began to fear that the doubt was only too well founded that had flashed upon him, that perhaps these sums were intended fraudulently to be substituted by Mr. Pample for similar sums that were legitimately due to Mr. Dalrymple, but that were not for some reason or other forthcoming in the

proper mode. And with the lurid light thus thrown upon the probable meaning of the document, Guy saw at last, as he believed, the true explanation of the great sum of 9,540*l.*, which was reported to be Def. in B.—Deficient in Bank, or Deficient in Balance—this now seemed to Guy to be the terrible truth he had discovered, and which gave a clue to the origin of the villanous scheme he had providentially overheard.

But, shocked by his own thoughts, and for a time incredulous as to the possibility of such guilt on the part of such a man, Guy tried in a thousand ways to find a more honest explanation of the paper ; but he could not. Conviction deepened every moment. Little as he knew of business operations, and conscious as he was that a more experienced man of the world might be quite able to explain these items satisfactorily, still, when he put all the facts together—the midnight meeting, the alleged unwillingness of Mr. Dalrymple to be personally seen by the agent—the lie, as he now felt sure it was, about Miss Dalrymple's intended marriage, and the exact agreement of the cheque with the calculations

of this mysterious paper, Guy came to the conclusion that his benefactor was being robbed on a gigantic scale, and that it was his fortunate lot to be able to expose the criminal, and so at least stay all further depredation.

But about this paper—would it be missed? And if it were would Mr. Pample guess the taker? He would soon learn that he (Guy) had been in the house and had escaped from it mysteriously during the night. What then? Guy looked about him, and felt for a moment what it was to be the depository of a secret affecting another man's life, and began to ask himself—was he quite sure of his own.

However that might be, Guy had no fear. He was indeed absolutely ignorant of fear unless in matters that touched the deepest springs of his nature; but the steward's conduct stunned and depressed him by the revelation of a wickedness that he had not hitherto deemed possible. Here was a man who notoriously owed all to the squire (for he had originally been only a poor boy who had blacked the boots and run the errands of a former steward); who was in the possession of a

handsome income ; who was always treated as a gentleman by the squire's associates, and almost as a friend by the squire himself ; who could have had literally no temptation to go wrong, except some base and secret thirst for gold which no reasonable draughts could satisfy. This was Guy's first thought. And bitter, indeed, was his indignation as he dwelt on the squire's probable feelings when the truth should be made known to him.

But as his thoughts went on, and he endeavoured to guide them into a practical course, he became troubled and confused at the possibility that Mr. Pample, though guilty, might succeed, somehow or other, in convincing Mr. Dalrymple of his innocence ; and, if he did so, he would doubtless cause Guy himself to be looked on with horror as a pitiful slanderer who desired to curry favour at the Hall. Guy thought that the steward might have taken precautions for protection which he was too inexperienced to guess at or to prepare for. The known talent, energy, and character of Mr. Pample seemed all to warn the young discoverer and possible accuser of the danger of failure, and of the ruin that would

follow if he did fail. The time, too, was peculiarly unfavourable. Guy had so deeply offended the squire that it was not at all improbable he would refuse to hear what he had to say ; or rather, that he would just hear enough to make him angry and resentful, but not enough to ensure his close and jealous attention to an inquiry into the truth of the accusation.

But then it was impossible to shut out quite another view of the business, one that made Guy uncomfortable even while he felt only too much interested in the speculations to which it led. Suppose he did convince Mr. Dalrymple, and so become the instrument of his safety against future acts of fraud and plunder, might not a great change take place in the squire's demeanour ; might he not so treat him, Guy, that he and Lucy might get nearer together ; might not the squire in time himself discover their mutual though unavowed liking, and at last be drawn insensibly into encouraging it ? It was a very natural, and surely very excusable, thought for so young a man, and for one who was full of that chivalrousness of feeling which belongs

to call forth truer instincts, and he shrank from asking or receiving any more personal favours from Susanna that involved even the semblance of an intimate mutual understanding. His recent silent communion of soul with Lucy seemed too sacred a thing in his eyes to be tainted with the least possibility of contact or association with a mere parody of it in his next meeting with Susanna. So he determined to linger in the fields till he saw his father go out to the workshop, and then slip in, and to bed without being indebted to anyone for aid. This delay gave rise to a new incident. As the villagers began to stir, he stood near the cottage, thinking it must be about his father's time. It was a bright morning. The village, which just here terminated, and melted off almost without obvious transition into the heathy fern-covered common, looked to Guy's eyes so much lovelier than he had ever seen it before, that he glanced about and upwards as if seeking some special atmospheric cause. But for that light which surpassed even sunlight itself in the magical effects on external nature Guy should have looked within : there was the hidden source of

all the ravishing splendour that lay upon the world. The sense that Lucy loved him kept rising from time to time in his soul, through all the depressing circumstances of his condition, and made his very pulses leap with an inner joy and delight that seemed almost allied to madness. And though he checked himself with the one idea, 'It is hopeless;' still, the mingled currents poured forth, but always strongest and uppermost were the ravishing sense of Lucy's secret love for him, and the new insight into the beauty of all created things.

It was just then, as he leaned against an old brick wall that was richly tinted by mosses and lichens, and over which hung the drooping tresses of a very large and very graceful weeping willow, he saw Susanna come to her casement window, open it, put up her hands wearily to her face, stand for some time as if in deep sadness, then begin to water some plants that she cultivated outside her window. But she seemed to do everything with such a distant, abstracted, and melancholy air that Guy, touched with a new sense of the holy mysteries of love, began to fancy Susanna loved him even more deeply

than he had believed or cared to believe, and he could not but feel a tender pity for one who kept her trouble so much to herself. But while he was speculating on these things, and half-inclined to look back severely on his own conduct (little as he was aware of there to reproach himself with in regard to Susanna), when his thoughts were drawn in another direction by the sound of a horseman coming thundering along the road, who soon came up, and who proved to be—as Guy's startled thoughts had already suggested to him it would be—Mr Pample.

He stopped as he reached the place where Guy stood. Guy's face was flushed, his brow knit, his eyes stern, his lips compressed together. But, instead of assailing him vehemently as Guy anticipated, the steward put on one of his sweetest smiles as he said,

‘Ah, Guy, is that you? Good-morning.’

‘Good-morning, sir,’ answered Guy, a little grimly, but with the old manner of respect.

Susanna, who had previously caught a glimpse of Guy's presence before he was aware of hers, did not, of course, lose sight of this meeting. She

drew back so as not to be visible to either of the speakers, and then listened eagerly to their talk, standing just within the open casement.

‘An early hour for us to meet abroad.’

‘It is, sir.’

‘I have been up to see a friend off who had to meet an early coach at Plackett; and, seduced by the beauty of the morning, I thought I would have a ride across the common before breakfast.’

‘Yes,’ thought Guy to himself, ‘and I know only too well why he is so condescending as to explain his intentions to me;’ but he only observed aloud,

‘It is indeed a very fine morning, sir.’

To Guy’s surprise, Mr. Pample now looked in his face and smiled, without saying a single word. Guy frowned and coloured, but that made Mr. Pample only smile the more ostentatiously. ‘What the d— does he mean?’ asked Guy angrily of himself, but unwilling, under present circumstances, to risk an explosion with the steward.

‘Well, well, my good youth, you have, I see, a shrewd wit, and can hold your tongue when you see occasion: one of the most valuable qualities in life.

So let me tell you I have heard of your freak of last night, and of your confinement at the Hall.'

'Indeed, sir!' simply remarked Guy, conscious that he was looking, as he felt, strangely perplexed between two very different currents of thought—the one connected with Mr. Pample's own guilt; the other with Lucy, who might have been seen by some one at the Hall while engaged in freeing him, and who might have told the steward. But Mr. Pample, with great good-humour, went on:—

'I believe I am even now the only person, with one exception, who knows of the escape of the prisoner.'

Guy listened in silence, dreading to speak lest his growing fury should overmaster him.

'Do you recognize this?' said Mr. Pample, producing the handkerchief he had picked up. Guy looked at it, saw the word 'Lucy' on the corner, and again waited in silence to learn the meaning of the steward's inexplicable behaviour.

'Well, I must say you're a lucky fellow to be so honoured. But hark ye, Guy'—and Mr. Pample drew his horse nearer to where the youth stood

shrinking back against a tree-trunk, and yet unpleasantly fascinated by a something in the speaker's eye and tone—'I had no suspicion of this until to-night. But now I say, be bold! If you want a friend, try *me*. And to begin with, I shall see that the keepers are quiet about your affair.' Without another word Mr. Pample whipped his horse and clattered along the road.

'So,' thought Guy, as he looked after the retreating horseman, 'he knows, or strongly suspects, I have got the paper, and he wants to bribe me.' It were too much to say that Guy did not for a moment think how much of happiness for him might lie in the direction indicated by Mr. Pample; he may even have wavered for a brief time in his conviction as to his duty, while his whole nature was roused to a state of passionate tumult by the mere speculation of a marriage with Lucy. But he was soon stopped when he began to ask himself how the affair was to be managed, and had to accept the answer—

'Why, by deception of course! She must deceive the squire—I must urge her on, and we must

both of us make this villain our friend and confidant.' The position needed only to be thus stated to bring back Guy to his right senses and to his old determination—never to attempt to take advantage of Lucy's favourable feeling—never to act treacherously to the squire; and with this now came the further resolve to lose no time in exposing Mr. Pample.

But a new fear thrilled through him. Mr. Pample, so far as he might have power, would be merciless in his thirst for vengeance. And it was probable he could do one thing even in his hour of ruin—say something to Mr. Dalrymple about himself and Lucy that would for ever bar their meeting—perhaps precipitate her marriage with some one else. Well, but what then? Had not Guy already determined upon such a sacrifice? True; but it is a very different thing for a young lover to come to such heroic conclusions of his own free-will and to be forced into them by others. And so with Guy. The very same prospect that appeared under one set of circumstances so sadly attractive, so touchingly but necessarily self-sacrificing, became, under

another, merely shocking—unnatural—and as justifiably provoking to resistance.

Guy found his brain getting confused and dizzy under so much cogitation. He was also weak bodily, for he had not eaten or drunk for many hours (the stolen glass of wine in Mr. Pample's room alone excepted), and he needed sleep and rest. So he went slowly into the cottage, thinking he would get a crust from the cupboard, go to bed, and, after a few hours, rouse himself to new exertion. But he was surprised on entering the kitchen to find a cheerful fire burning, the breakfast-table carefully laid, hot coffee on the hob, bread-and-butter cut ready on the table, which was further enriched by a vase of flowers. Guy was surprised. He looked round for Susanna, but he saw nothing of her. He listened at the foot of the stairs, but all was still above. Had she gone to bed again? She had certainly not gone out, for if she had Guy must have seen her go. And there was no talk going on upstairs, so she had not gone to his mother. He was puzzled. But, as he sat down to his breakfast, and found himself doing extraordinary

justice to it, and acknowledging that, on the whole, he had never enjoyed a meal so much in his life before, because he had never been so much exhausted for want of one, he could not but feel moved by the careful kindness and affectionate forethought to which he owed this timely feast. Of course he knew well enough whose handiwork it was—Susanna's. And he could not deny that he also guessed why she behaved in this peculiar fashion, doing all that she possibly could for him, but keeping out of his way, so that he might not thank her or see what else might be at work in her breast. 'But surely,' thought he, 'she will come soon to learn what I think of this.' But no. Susanna did nothing of the kind; and Guy had to go to his bed with the grateful words unspoken that he had intended to have said.

CHAPTER IX.

BOLD STROKES.

‘YES, that’s well managed,’ said the steward to himself, as he reviewed his late conversation with the young poacher. ‘I have said nothing, done nothing, that can cause him to attach any special meaning to my interference, if he has not taken away my paper ; and if he has, and guesses its meaning, I have given him a motive for holding his tongue, and for using any spare energy, or talent, or ambition, he may happen to possess in quite another path.

‘But I don’t understand this young fellow, nor do I at all like him. At times I cannot but fancy there is more in him than comes out. I see it in his eye, in his independent manner, his bold—almost scornful—look. I am sure he does not like me. The impudent rascal, to have any liking or disliking in such a matter !

‘ But I will not trust to this bribe alone. No, I will get the squire and Miss Lucy out of the place before many hours have passed, if it be at all possible. Let me see—how?’

The steward rode his horse about for a long time, trying to satisfy himself about this how. He went into all sorts of queer out-of-the-way places, as if fancying he might there find some queer, out-of-the-way idea that would do for him what he desired. He did not seem to succeed. Deeper and deeper grew his brown-study. At last, in sheer weariness he walked the animal towards the Hall, left him at the stable-door to the groom, and slunk across the courtyard as he heard the breakfast bell loudly ringing.

Again Mr. Pample had reason to be proud of his luck in little matters. Lucy looked so pale and wan-looking at the breakfast-table, that the kind squire was in despair. She said it was only a bad headache; but her uncle shook his head doubtfully, and looked at Mr. Pample, who, to his surprise, dropped his eyelids, did not smile—and bent his head as if he were desirous to prevent the

squire from seeing his face. In vain Lucy tried, by the sweetness of her tones and words, and by her resolute and repeated attempts—but always failing — attempts to eat, to convince Mr. Dalrymple there was nothing the matter. Surely she ‘might be indisposed, like other fashionable ladies, once in a way.’ The squire was not to be deluded. He loved Lucy too well not to understand that something had happened, or else that Lucy was really ill.

Scarcely was the breakfast over, and Lucy gone away on some pretence of business with Mrs. Hammett, before he drew Mr. Pample aside, and said to him,

‘Do you notice anything particular in my niece this morning — anything beyond mere temporary indisposition?’

‘Well, you must not be alarmed if I say I think I do. Doubtless, she will soon be better. We must hope so.’

‘Should I send for Dr. Gordon?’

‘I think not. I fancy I can throw some light upon the matter if you will permit me to speak freely.’

‘Surely you know me too well to doubt that at this time of life?’

‘Well, but I must respectfully ask you not to be angry if I am right.’

‘Angry!’

‘You shall hear. Last night I had, as you know, a friend with me, and we sat up late. When he had gone to bed I heard from the servant that a poacher—’

‘Ha! Is this what you are driving at? All a mistake! A great mistake, Mr. Pample!’

‘Pardon me. As I said, I heard from the servant that a poacher—young Guy Waterman—had been brought here to be examined by you, and confined for the night. When I was myself going to bed I thought I would see if he were still safe in the lumber-room, but the door was wide open—the bird flown!’

‘Very glad to hear it—I mean very sorry; but there, if he’s gone, all I shall say is—let him go.’

‘Oh, by all means. But may I ask whether you feel any interest in discovering who it was that freed the young scapegrace?’

‘Not I, not I. He’s gone, that’s enough.’

‘Yes, but I am sure you do not suspect what I happen to know.’

‘And that is—’

‘See, sir,’—and Mr. Pample produced Lucy’s handkerchief; ‘I found this just on the threshold of the door, where it had evidently been dropped during the night.’

‘I see! I see!’ Mr. Dalrymple said no more for a minute or two, but walked uneasily about the room. At last he came back and said, ‘Oh, this is all right and natural enough, and I am a great fool not to have seen it in a moment. It was I who suggested it to her. I said—and I remember it quite well now—that I wished he had escaped, and I wished he would escape. Poor Lucy! she knew I could not as a magistrate go any further, and so she took all the rest on herself.’

‘Yes, that’s very clear, and very noble of the young lady, and I hope, for her own sake, that she had no other feeling or motive. But this Guy’s a handsome young dare-devil; she has for years been more intimate with him when they have met than

with any other male acquaintance ; and I shouldn't be at all surprised if, while no thought discreditable to herself, or disloyal to you, ever entered into her mind, she has felt a secret liking for him that it is not at all desirable to encourage.'

Though the squire refused in words to believe anything of the kind, the suggestion made him uncomfortable. And no wonder, for he had himself, not unfrequently of late, had a sort of fear of the same thing come over him. But he did not choose in so delicate a matter to take Mr. Pample into his confidence ; Mr. Pample, he thought, was, in his way, an admirable man—perfect in all business relations—but not the sort of person that the squire could fancy as fit to fathom the tender depths of a maiden's heart. So, brushing aside the more delicate questions that had been raised as of no real moment, he again recurred to Lucy's health, and asked Mr. Pample what he thought they could do in a quiet way to benefit her.

Mr. Pample saw his time had come, and all the old impressive sweetness came back with tenfold

intensity to his face, all the old silveriness to his voice, as he said,

‘I am wrong and you are right. But, to make sure both ways, I suggest that you give her a change of scene; go to Bath, or Leamington, or—’

‘Suppose we cross the Channel and run over to Switzerland? I heard her say once how delightful it would be to make a tour through the Swiss mountains.’

‘Capital, sir. I would do it at once. You would be secure that way—and that way only—against any fresh meeting. A single accident might—’

‘I’ll go this very day, if you will see all our arrangements made.’

‘Oh, trust me, nothing shall be forgotten.’

About three in the afternoon (for Guy slept long, and when he waked lost some time, in making up his mind to accuse the great man’s steward of such monstrous forgery and fraud) Guy reached the Hall, determined to see Lucy, tell her all he knew, and be guided by her advice as to subsequent proceedings. To his astonishment, as he

crossed the courtyard to go in the back way, he saw the squire's travelling carriage loaded with trunks being taken round to the front, as if to receive some persons from the Hall who were probably there waiting for it at the porch, for there was an exhibition of haste and temper on the part of the servants that implied impatience on the part of the master. Guy guessed in a moment what was going on. And he resolved to run round after the carriage and stop the intending travellers at any risk. But at a corner of the court he ran against Mr. Pample, who seemed to be so much offended by the violence that he struck Guy with the thick end of a loaded whip that he carried in his hand, saying,

‘What the d—l do you mean by that, you young blackguard?’

Guy was stunned, but not so much so but that in a few instants later he was able to send Mr. Pample whirling along, downwards and onwards, upon the hard stone pavement, doubled up into a confused heap, bleeding and helpless.

‘Are you hurt, sir?’ asked Guy, when he had

begun to recover his own equanimity, and when he saw Mr. Pample in such a sad condition.

‘It’s you, is it?’ feebly murmured the steward, with a spasmodic attempt to raise the old smile. ‘I did not know it was you when you ran against me. Please to give me your hand. Thank you. If you will but fetch me a chair from the kitchen yonder, or tell one of the servants to come to me with it, I won’t detain you any longer.’

As Guy ran for the chair, inly cursing the delay, but still fancying he was in time for his purpose, and perceiving that Mr. Pample at least was now in no condition to interfere, the stable-helper, who had led the horses with the carriage round to the front, came back to the courtyard.

‘Are they off?’ asked Mr. Pample, with a wonderful return of animation.

‘Yes, sir, and them horses is so fresh that they won’t be kept in. They just did go when they were let loose.’

‘All right,’ thought Mr. Pample to himself. ‘But it’s well I was on the spot, even though at the price of such a knock-down. The fellow has the strength

of a Samson, and could as easily knock down a bullock, I dare say. But I think I've marked him for a bit. And I think he doesn't know that I knew him only too well. Oh! here he comes.'

Guy placed the chair for Mr. Pample, and then flew off to the front of the Hall, just in time to see the carriage whirling away at great speed along the park-road, and already so far off as to make utterly hopeless any attempt on his part to overtake it. As he gazed in despair, a handkerchief waved from the window. Was it for him? He looked round, and saw Mrs. Hammett at one of the Hall windows, also waving her handkerchief. So even that bit of comfort was denied him. She was 'gone' then, probably for ever, as far as Guy's relations with her were concerned! Despair suggested one last effort. Could he not overtake the carriage? It would require a long and severe struggle, for it was already far in advance; and, unluckily, its inmates would not see him, on account of the windings of the road among the trees. Nevertheless, Guy would have tried, for he was habitually swift of foot, and accustomed to bodily endurance, but that he felt a

growing sense of faintness and dulness about his head, which was speedily followed by a sickness so great that he was obliged to sit down on the low projecting stonework of the porch, saying to himself,

‘No, no; it is quite hopeless. He must have struck hard. He knew me, I suppose, though he denies it. I hope he hasn’t struck only too effectually.’ Still he grew worse, till at last he was relieved by utter unconsciousness; and when he again opened his eyes, Mrs. Hammett was busy bathing his temples with vinegar and water, a great tear rolling down her cheeks as she did so.

‘They ran against one another—I understand. Dear me! what a size the swelling is, and how black!’

Guy heard, got up, thanked her in few words (poor fellow! he could not say much), persisted in his refusal to go into the house, and, assuming an air of entire recovery, took his leave, though scarcely able to drag his failing limbs homewards, so great had been the effect of Mr. Pample’s vindictive but timely blow.

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Two or three hours later Susanna, who was on the watch for Guy's appearance, saw him coming through the evening dusk very slowly, supporting himself by a ragged stick, and almost tottering as he lifted one weary and heavy limb after another. Susanna took a second look to be sure she was not mistaken ; but she knew his general appearance and form too well to remain long in doubt, even though she could but dimly distinguish objects. She ran off, met him, spoke to him, heard his faint reply, which evidently struggled to make light of his condition, and said (and for once with something like real emotion),

‘Dear Guy, lean on me. Do!’

Guy could not refuse. He took her arm with his own disengaged hand; and, still using by the aid of the other the stick which he had dragged out of a hedge as he came along, they went together into the house.

‘How did it happen?’ inquired Susanna.

‘Mr. Pample struck me when I accidentally ran against him.’

‘The beast!’ exclaimed Susanna, not caring to mince her words, and remembering the steward's late advice concerning Lucy.

'He did not—he says he did not—know it was me,' continued Guy.

They said no more till they got into the house, when Guy put his finger on his lip, and looked towards his mother's bed-chamber. Susanna nodded in reply. Stephen was still out, plodding his way home from some distant country job. Susanna made Guy sit down on the old couch while she struck a light. As soon as she could see Guy's face distinctly, she gave a little scream of terror, it was so white and bloodless, and there was such a deep and black contusion on the temple. If Mr. Pample had carefully planned how to make a seemingly little blow go a long way, he could not have struck more skilfully. A feebler organization would probably have succumbed at once; but Guy was able at all events to maintain a stout struggle for life. Under his directions Susanna bathed the wound for a long time with tepid water to reduce the swelling, and, though no very perceptible effect was produced at the time, Guy fancied he should be better on the morrow.

But he was mistaken. Susanna helped him to his

bedroom with the same tender and patient hand. For days afterwards she nursed him. He could not get up; seemed, indeed, not to want to move from his bed. A deep stupor came over him. Susanna was frightened, and spoke to the doctor. He came, saw what had happened, and said it was an ugly wound, but that Guy would come round in a few days. Whether there was or was not some mental disorder increasing the bodily disorder, Susanna could not discover, but she vehemently suspected it. She had heard of the sudden departure of the squire and of the young lady, and she found it impossible to dissociate Guy's visit there at the same moment from his 'accident' with Mr. Pample, or from the profound melancholy that seemed to have since infected him. But Susanna said nothing on the subject to Guy. Whenever she thought he was thinking of it, she simply redoubled her noiseless attentions to him. And, although Guy found that she watched his every look and movement, that she half anticipated his every wish, he could not be hurt or displeased by it, for it was all done so unobtrusively. Certainly either Susanna's own character had changed a good

deal for the better, or she was becoming more thoroughly cognizant of his.

Of course Phœbe had not been kept in ignorance after the first day or so of what had happened ; and deep and terrible were her grief and anger—grief that Lucy had gone away ; anger that anyone, even the squire's steward, should have dared to strike Guy. But she calmed down when she saw how calm he was, and roused herself to fresh exertions for him when she saw that he needed help. She made Susanna and Stephen bring up to her (Phœbe's) bedroom the couch from down-stairs, and then Guy and his mother sat opposite each other, each looking with deep pity on the other's sad and wasted face, but for a time not venturing to talk. And thus silently they became to each other more than they had been for a long time ; for Phœbe had naturally resented Guy's constant absence from home and his apparent carelessness about herself. But now, in their mutual affliction of body and mind, their hearts grew again strongly together ; and, bit by bit, Phœbe drew from him the particulars of his recent adventures with the poachers, his night at the Hall,

Lucy's behaviour (though he said nothing of his own inner conviction as to her unexpressed sentiments), his consequent escape, his discovery of Mr. Pample's doings, the attempt to bribe him with the hope of a marriage with Lucy, and his failure to get to the squire in time to make the exposure he had determined upon. He did not even deny, when she pressed him to speak, that he believed Mr. Pample had intentionally thrown himself in his way and injured him at the critical moment when he had become aware of the young man's presence.

Phoebe listened with ever-increasing astonishment to the recital as it progressed, and could scarcely repress the impulse to get up—bedridden though she was—and hurry off to exact vengeance on Mr. Pample, and possibly afterwards hunt the squire over the Continent to make him aware what a rogue he had left behind him. She saw, and felt greatly excited at the prospect, that here was a new chance for Guy's perfect reconciliation with their old benefactor; nay, thought she, who could tell but he might put Guy into the steward's place, and thus Phoebe's dearest wishes be gratified. She might die

in peace then ; her secret unrevealed ; and yet the victim of her criminal act be freed from all its worst consequences ; he would no longer be condemned to eat the bread of poverty and dependence ; he would no longer be divided, as he had been, from one to whom he was so closely related by blood. Phoebe, in fact, still dreamed : was still unwilling to face the harsh fact that she was sacrificing the youth she so dearly loved to save her own guilty soul from the necessity of repentance and expiation.

But Guy shook his head at her schemes, and smiled languidly at her sudden forgetfulness of her weakness. What else he was thinking about she heard one day when he seemed to be getting stronger, though still suffering from bodily and mental lassitude.

‘ Mother, I wish you’d tell me what’s ailed Susanna lately.’

‘ Ailed her, Guy ?’

‘ Yes, what’s the matter with her ? Don’t you see how different she is from what she used to be ? How kind to you and—and everybody ?’

‘ I wonder, Guy, you haven’t noticed [that long

ago. She has been more than a daughter to me. But for her I should ha' been dead. Often what little bit o' meat we've had to eat was bought with her money.'

Guy started and walked rapidly up and down the room in great discomposure.

'That's a nice thing upon my word,' he said, at last; 'and she left in your charge in such a way!'

'It mayn't be right, Guy; and, Heaven knows! the thought on't has often turned the bread sour that I ate, and made my drink vinegar; but what could we do? You wouldn't ha' like to ha' found us some night starved to death, or been told we'd gone off to live as paupers in the workhouse.'

'And do you know how much has been had this way?'

'She does; it's a good many pounds.'

Guy was silent for a time; but presently he said,

'Mother, where's father?'

'Gone again, poor fellow! miles away to see if he can get employed on a new church. But he's afraid they won't think him clever enough. He's been trying to make a bit of moulding to show them,

such as he knows they want. He has lost all heart ; and I don't wonder, for half his time he hasn't enough to eat.'

Guy stared at his mother as though she had told him some new and appalling fact. But, after a little reflection, he seemed to grow only more silent and gloomy. He was, in fact, saying to himself, 'as if I might not have known it was so—must be so!'

When he next broke silence it was to remark,

'Don't take any more money from Susanna without first telling me. You won't, will you?'

'No, no. And I ain't afraid now, Guy dear.'

'Why?'

'Because I can see you are coming round and going to look after us a bit.'

Guy didn't seem to care at present to carry that line of questioning any further, so again reverted to the change in Susanna.

'Her temper's a great deal better,' he said.

'Yes, quite changed,' replied Phœbe. 'No matter how cross I get, and I do get cross and miserable sometimes as I lie here and think, she is always the same ; never answers except in a kind

way, though at times the old spirit's strong in her, for she'll bite her lip till the blood comes.'

'But you don't answer my question—what has ailed her of late?'

Phœbe was silent. She had not quite dismissed the idea of Lucy; on the other hand, her womanly heart sympathized with what she believed to be Susanna's secret love. She pondered so long over what she should say in answer that Guy forgot, or appeared to forget, his question. But after a little while he said abruptly, half to his mother, half to himself,

'I must find a way to put an end to all this, and begin afresh. God knows I am sick enough of things as they are.'

He did not wait to hear his mother's comment, but took his candle, wished her coolly good-night, came back under some new impulse to kiss her fondly, and then went away with a step that had lost all its elasticity. As he went up the stairs he met Susanna coming down. She shrank back into a little landing as if to evade him, but he seized her hand and said,

‘Susanna, you have been very kind to me, and I have never thanked you.’

He held her hand, looking into her fair but flushed face with the aid of the candle. She looked at him for a single instant, seemed about to cry, and, taking his hand, was going to kiss it in a confused sort of way ; but Guy exclaimed with a half-laugh that was not very mirthful,

‘No, no, Miss Susanna, not exactly !’

And putting one hand upon her shoulder he drew her towards him, not with any great difficulty, and kissed her in a more manly fashion. Susanna did not blush, but she burst into tears, and ran downstairs, leaving him lost in a compound of thoughts and feelings that were much more engrossing than satisfactory.

CHAPTER X.

HOW GUY BEGINS TO REFORM.

A FEW evenings after that one in which occurred the conversation between Guy and his mother as recorded in our last chapter, and when Guy, to the alarm of both Phœbe and Stephen, had begun again to absent himself late at nights, the latter was returning homewards, as usual, footsore, depressed, unsuccessful. But he was thinking more of Phœbe's disappointments and possible temper than of his own; for Phœbe was one person to Guy and quite another to Stephen. The irritabilities she could not repress fell upon her husband; the blame she must lavish somewhere was sure to come across him. So, as he jogged along, with his tool-basket slung at his back, he was trying to think of something to say to her that should keep up her spirits and his own.

‘Let’s see. Oh, I know! I’ll tell her that I’ve got to take a sample of the moulding as soon as possible to show as a specimen. Yes, there’s no harm in saying “I’ve got to,” instead of “I mean to,” for I do. Yes, yes; we’ll see if Stephen Waterman’s forgotten how to work yet.’

And he gave his tool-basket a jerk, held his thin coat to cover his breast, and struggled on manfully against the vigorous and sharp east wind that had risen. Then he began to think of his son, and to say to himself, ‘Ah, Guy could knock it off in an hour, whereas it will be as much as I can do in a day.’ Gradually his brow became overcast, his basket hung slack over his shoulder, and his coat blew wide open. When he drew near home he went first to the workshop, put his hand through a broken pane to reach the key, laughed bitterly as he remembered why that arrangement had been made—namely, to allow either him or Guy to get in when the other might be away on a job, unlocked the door, and threw his tool-bag in. He then refastened the door, replaced the key, and set off in a brisk run till he turned into the road opposite

the 'Fighting Cock.' There he lagged a bit, for his trouble had gone with his breath, and now came back with it. He began to cross towards the public-house, as he had at one period years ago done every night for months together for his own sake, and at another and later period for Guy's, who had there found his poaching acquaintances. Tommy Grimes, or Squinting Tommy, as he was called, stood lounging at the door. Stephen turned round, just when reaching Tommy, as if he had altered his mind. 'No, no, thank you,' he said to himself, 'we won't have that little farce over again. I used to have enough of that every night. What's the use of asking? Of course Guy's there, now that he's well again!' But Stephen having recommenced, we suppose, found it not so easy to resist an old habit, for he moved off in the direction of the 'Fighting Cock' and found himself beginning the old farce once more.

'Good-night, Tommy,' said he, as if he were going straight past.

Tommy knew his part, as well as he might, having acted it so often with old Waterman.

‘Good-night, master,’ said he.

‘Fine night,’ remarked old Waterman, pausing to listen for Guy’s voice inside.

‘Yes it is, but it’s cold and windy,’ answered Tommy, with one eye on the moon and the other apparently directed round the corner. Tommy’s spare eye was always expecting some one round the corner when he stood at that door. They both stood silent a minute. A girl opened the bar door to get more beer, and out burst the shouts and singing as if every single voice there was trying to outdo all the others.

‘Pringle’s men again?’ asked old Waterman, not sure whether he heard Guy’s voice or not.

‘Yes,’ Tommy answered, looking round at the open door and winking dolefully at old Waterman at the same time. ‘Yes, a lazy, young scamp; and he’s there again among ’em—first time, though, arter a long while.’

‘Good-night, Tommy; you needn’t tell him I asked. Bother it,’ said he, setting his teeth as he went on, ‘what’s the good of saying you won’t do

a thing, Stephen Waterman, and then going and doing just the same as you used to do, on and off, for so many months?’

When old Waterman stood at his own door he pulled himself up and stuck his hat in a rollicking way at the side of his head, and tried to look as if he had got a good day's wages in his pocket and a better one in store. He opened the door gently, and stepped in. The place was square and tidy enough, but somehow everything, from the clock with its weights trailing on the floor to the mutton-bone and crust on the table, had a used-up, woe-begone look about it, not enticing to a cold, hungry man. The very tongs seemed to him to have a poverty-struck aspect, standing bolt upright in the fender with their legs stuck tightly together as if they hadn't parted to take up a bit of coal for the last six months.

‘Now, don't you go and fall into the general state of things here,’ he said to himself, as he shut the door. ‘Look at the best side of everything—that's your motto, mind!’ Taking up the mutton-bone, he went upstairs to Phœbe, who was mending

a shirt by the flickering light of a bit of candle which was nearly expended. •

‘Well! what news?’ said she, looking up with a sharp, greedy look in her poor eyes.

‘Nothing settled,’ said old Waterman, trying to remember his little speech; ‘but I’ve got to take a sample of the moulding to-morrow.’

His wife hid her face in her apron and said,

‘God help us, and help yon poor children!’

These children were the sons of a sister of Phœbe, who had died lately in great distress in a distant part of the country, and had with her latest breath begged that the orphans might for a time be taken to Phœbe, who would act a mother’s part to them. So appealed to, Phœbe was not the woman to turn the little things out of doors when they were brought; the more so that she could not blame her sister in any way for the act. Phœbe—always proud, and always looking forward to some kind of future that should make up for the present—had wilfully kept her troubles from her distant relatives, who therefore looked upon her and Stephen as very well-to-do people. Of course, the

presence of these children enhanced all the pecuniary difficulties of the Watermans' household. Phœbe and Guy had alike agreed that they would not again allow Susanna to help except in the last extremity, and they had persuaded Stephen to act in the same way. As a natural consequence, they tried to keep the full knowledge of their straits from Susanna, who for the most part catered for herself, at their express desire ; and who did not by any inconvenient prying or curiosity discover a jot more than was desired of such unpleasant facts.

'Come, this *is* comfortable,' said Stephen, sitting down by Phœbe to his meagre supper, his teeth chattering with the east wind, though he tried to put on a warm, cozy look as he leant back in his chair.

'Comfortable, indeed !' said his wife, with a frosty kind of laugh, that froze old Waterman's blood more than the sight of the sapless food, or the feeling of the draught from the broken and papered window. 'Comfortable, indeed ! I know it will soon be the ruin of poor Guy, that and something else, if we don't manage to make things better for him at home.'

‘I suppose you mean Miss Lucy,’ said old Waterman. ‘For my part, I should ha’ wondered if she did have anything to say to him.’

‘Yes, yes,’ answered his wife tartly; ‘it’s that kind of talking to him, and suppers like what that meat will be by the time you’ve done, that made the lad take to the alehouse and poaching.’

Stephen made no more attempts at the conquest of cheerfulness under difficulties. Nor did he touch his supper; but went off in silence to bed. Phoebe then began secretly to reproach herself; but as she said nothing to poor Stephen he was none the better for the process; and, before she could make up her mind what she ought to say, her attention was drawn by hearing Guy’s step pacing to and fro overhead. But, though Phoebe was glad to perceive that the ‘Fighting Cock’ had not kept him to as late an hour as of old, she was surprised that he did not come in to his supper—such as it was—and to wish her good-night. Let us clear up the mystery, and with it do away with a reproach to Guy’s recent resolves. It was quite true, then, that he had been to the ‘Fighting Cock,’ but it

was only to get one of his old companions whom he could trust to go to the Hall, a visit of which we will say more by-and-by. While there, Guy, not desiring to make a fuss about 'intentions,' had simply for an hour or so fallen into the old routine, though continually wondering how he could have submitted to it, and measuring impatiently the time when he might withdraw without exciting any particular comment.

It so happened, also, that as he got home and ascended the stairs he had heard his father's remark about 'Miss Lucy,' and the 'drinking and poaching,' and it had not inclined him to face either the speaker or the listener just then. So he went up to bed. The two children slept in the same room. One of them was crying. Guy went to the cot, and put his finger down for its little hand to take, saying,

'What's the matter, old man?'

But the child pushed his hand away, and cried fretfully,

'No, no; me want bread, Guy, me do.'

Guy looked at the little fellow in silence. He

had often been lectured, and reasoned with, and taunted, and had turned a deaf ear to all ; but somehow that little weak cry went right to his heart and gave it a great shock. He turned away, and, after long walking about, went quietly downstairs. Susanna was spending the night out with a friend. His father and mother were asleep in bed ; but Phœbe had made Stephen go down in his shirt and put the 'supper' on the kitchen-table ready for Guy in case he looked for it. He took the crust upstairs and broke it in two, and stood at the foot of the bed watching the little fellows sit up and eat it, while they stared at him and each other with their big, sleepy eyes. When they had finished he covered them up again, after they had put their arms round his neck, and rubbed their soft little faces against his, and called him 'Good Guy, dear old Guy!'

He stood looking at them till they fell asleep again, and then he said to himself, as he drew his sleeves across his eyes,

'I'll go over to the workshop this very night, and if I don't get that out of the old tools that shall

make a difference here I'll never set eyes on any of 'em again.'

So he put some matches in his pocket, and, going softly downstairs, and closing the door quietly, he set off towards the workshop. Before he got there he began to think whether it wouldn't be better to wait for morning, and then go over to Burnside for a bit of the moulding on which his father's hopes rested than to trust to his recollection. But as he was out he stuck to his purpose ; and as soon as he had entered the shed and lit his candle, and got his tools together, he found the bit his father had left there, so he shut himself in and set to work.

Guy worked away by the light of the bit of candle stuck in a varnish-bottle as he had not worked for months, never stopping except just to warm his hands by swinging his arms across his breast, or stamping his feet to prevent them getting numbed by the coldness of the night, which was severe in that fireless place. Two or three times he threw his work aside and began a fresh piece, till at last he found himself mastering the difficult pattern of the moulding, and then all sense

of hunger, weariness, and cold disappeared in the keen pleasure it gave him to feel once more the power he had thought for ever gone. Turning over an old drawer for a chisel he wanted, he found a bit of stale crust ; and, sitting down on a heap of planks, took out his pocket-knife and shaved off the mouldy edges, and ate it with a keener appetite than he had ever sat down to a meal with since the days of his apprenticeship.

He had just finished the sample, and was holding it in his hand comparing it with the other, and half-fancying his own the best of the two, when he thought he heard a footstep outside the door. He put his work down on the bench and listened ; but he heard nothing for a minute but the wind and the howling of the farmyard dog. So he took up his work again, but quickly dropped it. There *was* a footstep—then a grating noise in the lock of the door, as if the key was being turned round which Guy had left in. Guy stood in the middle of the workshop with doubled fists. The grating noise continued. In moving Guy dropped a chisel, and the noise it made in falling on the bricks seemed to

startle the intruder, for he paused. The door, however, was slowly opened, and a figure stood hesitating on the threshold. Guy sprang forward and caught it by the collar.

‘Who are you, and what do you want here?’ he demanded fiercely, trying to drag the man into the light. Then, suddenly letting him go, he cried in astonishment, ‘Why, father, is it you?’

‘Me! yes!’ said old Waterman, shaking himself; ‘and it’s you, is it, that’s half strangled me? But what are you doing here, Guy?’ he added, looking at him suspiciously.

‘I’m looking for something,’ Guy muttered, hiding his work under some shavings, and turning the things over. ‘But whatever brings you here, father?’

‘Ah! it’s not the first time by a great many that I’ve come here at night to try and make up for a bad day—not to much account, either. I’ve come now to have a try at copying this. You know it; it’s the moulding of the vestry at Burnside.’

‘What’s the good?’ said Guy, turning away much moved. Was it possible his father had been

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spending his nights in that wretched place, while he, Guy, had been lying abed or drinking at the 'Fighting Cock,' or engaged in still more dangerous courses? 'What's the good?' he repeated, for the sake of saying something, 'when Miles Stirling's sure to have it?'

'Stop a bit,' said his father. 'Miles Stirling hasn't got it yet. Suppose he should be behindhand with his sample? They won't wait; the clerk told me so to-night. But you haven't said what brought you here—no business of mine, I suppose?'

Guy pushed the new bit of moulding to him without a word. Old Waterman took it up and held it under the candle, and his grey, sunken eyes quite twinkled again, as if they saw inestimable riches in that tiny bit of workmanship.

'That's it!' cried he, all in a tremble. 'That's it—zigzag line, double bead, and all that; that's been bothering my head all day! Yes, you've done it, Guy—ay, that you have! Come, come, the lad'll be the making of us yet. I'll take this off to Burnside as soon as it's light.'

While Guy pinched the candle out with his

finger and thumb, old Waterman laid the bit of moulding tenderly in his pocket, and opened the door. To their surprise a pale ray of light entered the workshop, and a soft breeze puffed the shavings along the ground.

‘Why, I declare it’s morning,’ said old Waterman.

‘Yes, and a fine one too,’ answered Guy, and the two stood a minute looking about them. Stars glimmered overhead ; but the pale grey dawn was breaking, and streaks of light, slowly running into crimson, flushed the east. The cocks crowed shrilly in the farm behind, and were answered sleepily by those in the neighbouring hamlets. A robin looked out of the old thatch of the shed and began to sing. Father and son also looked about, and there was a feeling in both their hearts of the dawn of a new life. But they could not talk. They could only step forth sturdily side by side, and break into a cheery whistle as they took a turn across the common before asking as to what was their chance of breakfast.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LETTER TO THE SQUIRE.

THE next day Stephen came home in a state of such excitement as he had probably never before been seen in. The whole of the carpenter's work in the vestry of Burnside had been confided to him and to Guy, after a brief examination of the sample of moulding which the latter had prepared in his night's work at the workshop.

'Why, it'll employ us both for weeks, pay us famously all the time, and bring us no end of good jobs afterwards,' said Stephen exultingly to Phœbe, while acknowledging Guy's skill as the cause of his success.

Guy himself was much pleased, for he knew there was a good deal of delicate and beautiful woodwork in that vestry; he had often admired it, often thought he should like to try his hand at a carving

of fruit and flowers similar to the ornaments around the vestry mantel-piece. Having now got an introduction to the place he thought he might by-and-by get a chance of replacing some of those ornaments which were decayed. He fancied he could do it with a skilful and loving hand after a little practice.

But while the work was thus in itself pleasant to him he valued it much more for its satisfying effect on his own mind and for its pecuniary results as regarded the family. He could now feel a little more at ease on both subjects. He was earning his bread honestly and bringing new hope to his home. So he worked hard. Often his father saw him pause for a moment, look round with an absent air, sigh heavily if he fancied himself unobserved, but then again push away at his chisel with renewed vigour.

But Guy was not the less cogitating how to fulfil the duty he owed to Mr. Dalrymple, and indirectly to Lucy, whose future interests might be seriously imperilled by the steward's frauds. As we have already said, he had gone to his old haunt, the 'Fighting Cock,' for a single night in search of a

former companion, who would go secretly to the Hall and obtain the squire's present address. Guy had thought it would be useless and imprudent for him to go himself to the Hall under present circumstances, where Mr. Pample reigned supreme in the squire's absence; and yet his only chance to communicate with Lucy was to learn to what place she and the squire had gone. His messenger had faithfully fulfilled his mission of inquiry, but could learn nothing from the servants more than this—they were travelling somewhere in Switzerland; and the only way to get anything into the squire's hands was to give it to Mr. Pample or Mrs. Hammett, who were frequently sending to the travellers and knew beforehand all their movements. So Guy prepared, with great labour and study, some half-dozen versions of a letter to Lucy before he could satisfy himself with any one of them; and then, putting it under cover to Mrs. Hammett, he again set out on a mission of adventure. He dared not trust his letter to a messenger, so was obliged to risk a meeting with the steward. Knowing, however, how important it was to avoid Mr. Pample

while securing the transmission of the packet to Mrs. Hammett, and how desirable it was that he should himself, if it were possible, put it into her hands when she might be alone—he determined to try if he could not waylay her in the kitchen garden, which was a little distance from the mansion. He remembered to have heard her say how fond she was of that place ; and that she generally managed to take a stroll through it, for her daily exercise, about noon, after finishing her morning duties. So, keeping out of sight from the windows of the Hall, he stole round by a by-way to the garden and got into conversation with one of the under-gardeners, whom he knew, and who was busily engaged in trimming the fruit-trees along the walls.

It was no wonder that Mrs. Hammett was so fond of the kitchen garden, for it was beautiful at almost all seasons of the year. The squire also liked to walk in it, and hence through a long series of years there had been a constant effort on the part of the gardeners to make the place as ornamental as they possibly could without destroying its useful character. It was still really a kitchen

garden, and a capital one if judged by the products, but not the less had it always a grand air about it; and for seven or eight months of the year had always something rich or luxuriant to show in flowers. The walls were very high and old, with handsome projecting copings, and were furnished to the very top, the whole way round, with the finest varieties of fruit—fig, pear, cherry, nectarine, and peach—giving quite a sheet of blossom in the early months, and immense quantities of fruit later in the year. The walks were everywhere bordered with espalier trees of the hardier fruits, interspersed at regular intervals with pillar-roses that made no shade, but gave an almost constant bloom, and with evergreen Portugal laurels trained like orange-trees to a single head. Wherever vegetables were grown they were arranged in beds that were kept to the eye within defined forms and limits by the bushes of raspberry, gooseberry, and currant, that the gardener kept in more picturesque shapes than usual. Old-fashioned frames and green-houses, and an orangery for the reception in winter of some noble orange-trees that formed an avenue in the pleasure-

grounds during summer, were among the other noticeable features of the place. But the quality that gave so great a charm to the whole was the exquisite air of neatness that always prevailed. Nothing like litter was ever tolerated for a moment; even the indispensable process of leaf-decay while the plants were maturing seed and laying up organizable matter for future growth were begrudged by the careful gardener; who was however, aware, that if he did not allow Nature to take her time and complete her ripening she would be revenged on him by inferior productions the next season.

How well Guy knew almost every plant in the place! He had wandered here with Lucy through many a happy boyish hour, picking for her the most beautiful and luscious fruit. That very ladder against the peach wall, from which the undergardener has just descended, is the one that Lucy ascended in another part of the garden when Guy once dared her into the attempt, but of which when she got down she seemed so heartily ashamed that never again, under any circumstances, had Guy

seen the high-spirited but sensitive girl drawn into such adventurous positions.

Guy wondered whether the under-gardener knew of his recent confinement in, and escape from, the Hall; but, if so, he said nothing, though at times his manner appeared a little constrained. The day passed on—one, two, three o'clock, and Mrs. Hammett did not appear. Guy's delay must be growing a matter of suspicion. What should he do? Trust this man with his letter or go home and wait for another opportunity? It seemed probable that the housekeeper had given up her walk for the day; was busy, perhaps; or unwell. Still Guy did not like to resign the satisfaction of putting the letter into her own hands, accompanying it with an earnest word, and seeing for himself how she received the request. But as the under-gardener seemed to be getting fidgety, and more than once looked at his watch, Guy at last said to him,

'I wish, Norris, you would do me a kindness.'

The man who had a stooping habit looked up sideways and suspiciously at him, before he replied,

'What is it?'

‘Well, just this: I want to send a letter to the squire on a very serious matter; and, to tell you the truth, I don’t want it to get into the steward’s hands, or for him to know anything of the business; which is important.’

‘I can’t do it. It’s as much as my place is worth. You must know that well enough.’

‘I? I don’t understand you.’

‘Well, I’m no enemy of yours, and so I’ll tell you something that it concerns you to know. Mr. Pample said to our foreman the other day, and I know he said the same to the butler in the house, that he had an ill opinion of you and your companions; and that he shouldn’t be at all surprised if some attempt wasn’t made upon the Hall in the squire’s absence by some of your fellows, so he told us all to look out for interlopers; and, as to you, he said particularly he’d give anyone a guinea who might be the first to tell him that you were lurking about the premises.’

‘Well, then, why don’t you earn your guinea?’

‘I don’t exactly see as that’s a question you ought to put.’

‘You are right ; I might have seen for myself that it’s because you’re an honest fellow and don’t care to earn devil’s wages. How many years have you been here ?’

‘Since I was the height of that gooseberry bush—or rather that’s nonsense, for I remember looking up at the great gooseberries in just such a bush as that when I was getting some. My father was then in the same situation that I now hold, and we lived in the same cottage there just outside the wall.’

‘Can you believe me if I tell you that this letter in no way concerns my interests ; I mean that it is not written with a view to anything I want from the squire, but it is written to warn him of a great danger and loss that concern himself.’

The under-gardener looked round to see if any one was listening, and cast an inquisitive glance towards the door that opened in the direction of the Hall ; then, dropping his voice, he said, with a side look of his eye that Guy perfectly understood,

‘Does it concern *him* ?’ For an instant Guy

paused in silent reflection ; he remembered that the man was already aware that the letter was not to go through Mr. Pample's hands, and therefore it was too late for a policy of reservation, whereas frankness might succeed. So he said,

‘ Well, don't ask me any more—it does.’

‘ Then I'll do it, if you can show me how to do it safely. I hate him ! ’ added the man, closing his teeth suddenly, as though stung by the recollection of some individual wrong or insult. ‘ Not, however, for that,’ said he, recollecting himself, ‘ but because you say it's to benefit the squire.’

‘ It is. And now listen. First, can you tell me where I shall be sure to find Mrs. Hammett if I go direct into the house ? ’

‘ Why, no ; she's always on the move till towards tea-time, when she sits down to enjoy herself. But it's ten to one but you'll find her if you go direct to her own room, and wait there a bit.’

‘ Very well. Now I'll tell you what you shall do. You shall earn your guinea after all,’ said Guy, with a malicious laugh. The man stared, but Guy explained himself. ‘ If you'll go direct

to Mr. Pample, tell him the exact place where I am now lounging about in the garden, say I've been here for some time, and bring him with you by the nearest route across the courtyard, and if you don't find me here, then take him to look for me in the pleasure-grounds, or about the fish-pond, or wherever else you think so sly a fellow as myself is likely to be found.' Hearty laughs from both stopped all further conversation. 'The man simply said,

'You'll have to look alive; and musn't blame me if, after all, you're caught.' He then went off.

Guy withdrew to a little inclosure of evergreens that surrounded some of the outhouses of the mansion, and there waited till he saw the steward come forth, limping with a stick slowly along the courtyard; then, lifting a window that opened into the basement story of the Hall, Guy climbed through, and moved rapidly towards the house-keeper's room. Luckily, she was there, and busily engaged with a tray full of tarts that smelt deliciously, and were of her own making, intended for the special delectation of Mr. Pample, who liked

tarts. She started on seeing the apparition of a tall young man, who did not belong to the household, invading her sanctum; but as soon as she knew it was Guy she smiled, held out her hand, and said to him,

‘I hope you are better?’

‘Oh, quite well, and many thanks to you.’

‘How you must have butted one another,’ said Mrs. Hammett; and Guy laughed in sympathy with her laugh, and thought it best not to interfere with her explanation of the accident—that he and Mr. Pample had simply run against each other. ‘Won’t you sit down?’ kindly continued the lady as she looked with interest on Guy’s manly form and handsome face, now flushed with the consciousness of the difficulty of his task.

‘Mrs. Hammett, I have a great favour to beg of you. Will you cause this letter to be instantly forwarded to Miss Lucy, wherever she may happen to be? It is very important, and is not really for her,’ he said with a blush, ‘but for the squire.’

‘To be sure I will. I’ll give it to Mr. Pample, and he—’

‘Do not be angry with me, if I say I wish no one, not even Mr. Pample, to know of this. No one but you.’

‘That is strange,’ remarked Mrs. Hammett, looking very grave.

‘It is; but if I had any wrong motive you may be sure I would not choose you to be my instrument, or Mr. or Miss Dalrymple to be the victims.’

‘Yes; but do not you see that—that—it’s not friendly of me towards a gentleman in Mr. Pample’s position? He might think it underhanded. I shouldn’t like him to be sending letters to the squire, which might be about me, and to oblige people who owned that they wished me to be kept in the dark. Would you like it yourself?’

‘I can only reply this is a matter which must be treated as an exception. Do you consent? It is, I declare to you, solely in the squire’s interest that I act.’ Mrs. Hammett grew confused between her desire to oblige Guy, do her duty to the squire, and yet not violate her sense of good-fellowship with Mr. Pample. So Guy, who was getting alarmed at the prospect of the steward’s ap-

pearance to assist in their deliberations, made yet a last appeal :—

‘Pray do this for me Mrs. Hammett! I tell you the letter’s meant for the squire though it’s written to Miss Lucy. If there’s anything in it that shouldn’t be, I shall get the blame, not you. But there isn’t, and you’ll soon hear from them that it’s all right as far as you and I are concerned. Won’t you trust me, Mrs. Hammett?’

‘Well, you have an honest face, and though you’ve been a bit wild I have always myself had a good opinion of you, so you may give me your letter.’

‘There it is, and a thousand thanks with it. I don’t know what mightn’t have happened if you had refused me. See it off safe for the squire’s sake, and wish it luck.’

‘But won’t you stay a little?’ said Mrs. Hammett, ‘we needn’t speak about your letter, you know.’

‘No thank you, I think I’d best be going,’ answered Guy. And he took his leave, very well pleased with his success.

The under-gardener, though he led Mr. Pample through every turning and winding of every walk in the kitchen-garden and adjoining pleasure-grounds, could nowhere find the lurking poacher, young Guy Waterman. He was quite sure he had seen him and talked to him; quite sure he had left him near the orangery while he slipped out to warn Mr. Pample. That gentleman grew fatigued, heated, angry; but still he hobbled determinedly along, being far from recovered from the injuries he had received from his fall, but moved by sufficient reasons to induce him to submit to a great deal of pain while hoping to intercept communication with the squire. For Mr. Pample knew as well as if he had been by Guy's side of late what he must be aiming at, and how important it must be for him—Pample—to make these attempts end in failure until such time as means might be found for sweeping the fellow out of the country or reducing him to permanent silence.

But vain was the search for Guy. Unwillingly the steward took a guinea from his pocket and gave to the under-gardener for his zeal; and then, vexed

and depressed, he dragged himself back into the house.

But at tea that evening, while his thoughts were uselessly beating about in every direction to discover the exact effect of Guy's recent visit, he noticed a change in Mrs. Hammett's face and manner. She was not exactly taciturn or distant, and yet Mr. Pample fancied she did not behave to him with her usual genial good-nature. But she might be unwell, or she might have some little trouble or annoyance of her own. He was beginning to dismiss the matter from his thoughts, when she observed,

‘Are you writing to the squire to-day?’

‘No, I think not.’

‘I asked because I am writing to Miss Lucy, and thought I could inclose for you.’

‘No, I think not, thank you.’ No more was said, but Mr. Pample thought a great deal more. She was writing to Miss Dalrymple, was she? She had forgotten perhaps, though he had not, that only the day before she had said, in answer to a similar question from him, that she had nothing at present

to send to the young lady—only to give her duty and say all was going on well. The fact was odd, to say the least of it. It was also unaccompanied by any explanation. And it had this further peculiarity, that it might mean that Mrs. Hammett had secretly determined beforehand not to hand the letter to him for enclosure; and had, therefore, cunningly suggested that she was sending, and could enclose for him. He looked at her whenever he could steal a glance unobserved; and the traces of recent discomposure in that full, handsome face, which time dealt with so gently, seemed to steal as by an undesirable sympathy into his own.

He endeavoured to linger near her till post time, so that he might see the sort of letter she despatched. But she cut short this plan by begging him when he had had a sixth cup of tea to excuse her or she would be too late for the mail-cart, and without waiting for an answer she withdrew to another room.

And now he began seriously to fear that she had seen Guy, or at least had received from him some written communication which she had undertaken to

forward. What should he do? He saw only one certain course, and that one he could hardly hope to conceal from Mrs. Hammett, and which, if discovered, would be very damaging: it was, to meet the youth who went daily from the Hall with the family post-bag, and who took it across the park to the lodge by the high road where the mail-cart passed. In vain he sought for some less dangerous method. She would be sure to put the letter herself into the bag, and see the lad depart (if she had any secret thing going on in which Mr. Pample was interested); and when once the bag reached the postman's hands all the letters within it would be, of course, beyond reach. So that it was a clear logical conclusion that the lad must be met, and the letter got from him on some pretence or other; unless, indeed, he could be juggled out of it without his knowledge: a result that would be worth everything to Mr. Pample. He ransacked the whole world of possibilities, and at last he saw, he thought, a faint dawn of hope. The lad always rode on a pony, being frequently delayed to the last minute by the inmates of the Hall. Mr. Pample ordered

out his own horse for a ride, and mentioned in the hearing of the servant, some business he had to do in a direction opposite to that always taken by the lad with the mail-bag. He started in the direction he had indicated some time before the lad would have to start; and he thought, as he passed the front of the mansion, that he saw Mrs. Hammett suddenly draw a curtain across to conceal herself, as if she had been watching him. He made a great round, riding fast, so as to secure being in time to reach the spot he had fixed on, a grove of thick young trees, through which the road wound. When he got there, he hastily pulled up his horse, fastened him to a tree quite out of sight from the road, and began operations. He took from his pocket a bright crimson silk handkerchief, a new one he had lately bought in a distant town, which he had not yet used, which bore no name or initials, and which, therefore, could not be recognized as his. This he dropped in a carelessly careful manner on an open stretch of grass, a few yards from the road, where the lad would be sure to see it, but where he could not get at it without leaving the pony, on

account of a fence which had lately been put up as an inclosure for game. Immediately opposite this open but fenced-in spot in the wood there was, on the other side of the road, so thick an undergrowth among the large trees that Mr. Pample was able to conceal himself among it and watch his time for further operations.

By-and-by the lad came trotting along, evidently in no hurry. But he did not stop where Mr. Pample had expected him—did not see the crimson spot on the grass, brightly as it glowed there in the sunset—not at least till he had nearly got out of sight of the place. But Mr. Pample threw a heavy stone up among the trees, and its noise in falling drew the lad's attention; he looked round, did not see what he looked for, but pulled rein instantly at the sight of the bright-coloured handkerchief. He trotted back, seemed to pause as if wondering whether it would be claimed by anyone else, then jumped to the ground, leaving, just as Mr. Pample had hoped he would, within a few yards of his place of concealment, his pony and the bags, which Mr. Pample, on account of his own secret anxiety for

the safety of the bags, had long ago caused to be carried under the saddle-flap, so as not to attract attention. And so the instant the lad got over the fence and was shut out from Mr. Pample's view by the undergrowth which extended to the edge of the opening, the latter ran into the road, lifted the saddle-flap, opened the mail-bag, and took out from among other letters the one he sought, which was a thick one, in Mrs. Hammett's handwriting, and addressed to Miss Lucy Dalrymple. He then, to give the returning lad occupation both for body and mind, and prevent his loitering in the vicinity, struck the pony smartly and suddenly across the quarters with his riding-whip, and had the satisfaction of seeing the animal start off madly in the way he should go, and the lad, with his prize in his hand, toiling after him and shouting to him to stop.

As soon as both were out of sight and hearing, Mr. Pample went back to the place where he had left his horse, and leaning against him under the shadow of a great beech, opened the packet he had obtained with so much skill and address. It contained two letters, one addressed in a man's hand-

writing, which was unfamiliar to Mr. Pample, and yet only too well known to him by the very fact of its presence here; the other evidently from Mrs. Hammett. He opened that first. It ran as follows:—

“MY DEAR AND HONOURED YOUNG LADY,—I have been persuaded by a young man well known to you to enclose and forward a letter from him, which is to be kept a secret from every one here, except myself. He assures me—and he has made me believe—that it concerns only the squire’s interests, but is of very great importance in that respect. I hope he speaks truly. I think he does; and so I have consented: though not without some misgivings, for reasons that I need not mention. But I am sure you will know how to judge rightly of his communication, whatever it may be, both as regards your own action, and your love and duty to the squire, who, I hope, bears the fatigue of travel well. So no more at present from, dear madam,

“Your very humble servant to command,

“MARY HAMMETT.”

‘So, I am on the rascal’s track right enough,’ was Mr. Pample’s comment when he had read this. ‘But she seems to have a misgiving that the young vagabond is after some project of his own under cover of a seeming devotion to the squire. Likely enough; and yet, if so, why didn’t he act on my hint? It was broad enough. Does he think himself able to do without me, or rather, to win by sacrificing me? Perhaps; but let him look heedfully to his steps, or—’ Mr. Pample did not care to finish his mental sentence, but began to break the seal of the other letter, which he read with extreme deliberation. It was undated, apparently, because written at different times.

“DEAR MADAM,—Having failed in several attempts to communicate with you—first, before you went away, and next, in obtaining your address abroad—I am about to venture to seek the kind help of Mrs. Hammett, and I am in hope that through her you will receive this.

“The night you set me free from my confinement I had, as you will remember, to pass through Mr.

Pample's rooms. I was detained there some time before I could venture to cross the outer room, and while so waiting, I heard your name mentioned in connection with a matter that it must pain you for anyone in my position to have to speak of, and which I only venture to relate to you on account of its connection with more serious things that followed. Mr. Pample then was completing some very large business transaction with a gentleman, a stranger, from whom he finally received nearly seventeen thousand pounds; and he said, in the conversation that took place, that the money was to buy an estate for you on your marriage with some gentleman of rank and wealth, whose name was not mentioned.

“Of course, I had no right to disbelieve this, but I did disbelieve it for all that; and opportunity subsequently was afforded me in a remarkable way to test the steward's statement and conduct. I cannot here explain to you how, but I was, after long and painful thought, obliged to come to the conclusion that I was that night the unsuspected eye-witness to a terrible fraud against the squire, and that

it was only one of a series of acts, all of the same dreadful character.

“Of course, you will disbelieve this—perhaps you will for a time judge harshly of my motives. But I must bear that as well as I can. Only I beg you to believe that I have nothing to ask from the squire, and am not likely ever to have to ask anything from him.”

‘Is that hypocrisy or despair?’ parenthetically said Mr. Pample to himself, looking off the letter for a moment, in deep thought. But he soon resumed his perusal of the letter :—

“Indeed, I and my family have been under too many obligations to him in the past. I am grateful for these; but I am now in hope that my father and myself see the way to put an end to such dependence for the future; you will be glad to hear we have obtained the job of repairing the beautiful timber-work of the vestry at Burnside.

“Excuse these egotistical details, for they seemed to me necessary under present circumstances. To resume then my story :—

“Could I have got to you before your departure, I meant to have asked you if I had not better at once state to the squire what I knew in Mr. Pample’s presence. That is the course I would have taken if I had had only my own feelings to consult, and it was the course I hoped you would have sanctioned. But I was prevented from getting to you.

“What I venture to suggest is, that you at once open the matter to the squire, without any longer delay than will suffice to satisfy yourself as to the best mode. Pardon my saying so, but your uncle, whom I of all men should honour and reverence, is at times sudden and irritable; and may do something or other in the very generosity of his nature and his friendly confidence in Mr. Pample, to prevent the discovery of the truth. That is my only fear. All I wish is, that he shall patiently go into the business; and then, serious as the consequence may be to me individually—if I do not convince him of my own entire good faith, and of the impossibility of my acting in any other way, I shall be perfectly content with his decision. But I must not be judged unheard, and in accordance merely with Mr. Pample’s expla-

nations. I have only one practical measure myself to suggest: and should be very glad, dear madam, if you would ensure me at once justice, and a fair hearing, by learning indirectly from the squire, before telling him anything, and without raising his curiosity or wonder by your questions, whether it was with *his* knowledge that any such transaction as the one I have referred to took place that night. If he did know, then I must have been mistaken, and will do my best to confess and expiate my error to the gentleman concerned; but, if he did not know, then it is certain that I have been only too well justified as to the truth of my suspicions; for Mr. Pample said in my hearing, that the squire had just then signed the deed—a mortgage I think they call it—but that he did not choose to be personally seen in the matter.

“I need not say how anxiously I wait to hear from you, or from the squire.

“Believe me, dear madam,—

“Your obedient servant,

“GUY WATERMAN.”

‘Come,’ said Mr. Pample, after a second perusal of the letter, ‘here is matter for serious deliberation—that I must confess. If this fellow fails now, will he always fail? That must be looked to.’ He put Guy’s letter carefully into his pocket, tore Mrs. Hammett’s into small pieces, mounted his horse, and rode back towards the Hall by the same circuitous route as the one by which he had quitted it while under Mrs. Hammett’s eye.

CHAPTER XII.

ILLUSTRATING THE PHILOSOPHY OF WAITING.

DAY after day Guy looked in anxious expectation for the answer to his letter. When he found nothing occur for the first day or two after its delivery to Mrs. Hammett, he felt satisfied that it had been duly forwarded, and that she had not repented of her hurried acquiescence—a thing he had been rather inclined to dread. Of course he was not able to form any accurate notion of the time that would be consumed during the transit of his letter to Lucy and of hers back to him; but he fancied he might hear in eight or ten days, and he felt sure he must hear within a fortnight at the furthest. So he waited in apparent quietude, each day answering Phoebe's anxious question,

‘Anything yet?’ with the same words, accompanied by the same kind of quiet smile,

‘No, but it’ll come soon.’

Meantime the process of reformation that had lately begun in Guy’s breast went on. He had, without saying a preliminary word to anyone, taken his father’s affairs in hand, and promptly righted them by his skill, energy, and patient industry. In a similarly unaffected way he had restored the old affectionate relations between his mother and himself by paying her those few and brief but precious attentions which tell so much to those who need them. He went no more to the ‘Fighting Cock,’ no more on nightly expeditions; and yet, whenever he met his former companions, he shook hands with them with an easy, unchanged manner, as though he were not ashamed of his own altered conduct on the one hand, or inclined, on the strength of it, to preach to them about altering theirs.

But there was a more serious struggle in progress, and one that did not admit of such prompt settlement. He could not now doubt that Susanna was deeply attached to him, and had long, though silently, been so. Was he to blight her future life by disappointment? And for what? That he might con-

tinue to cherish in his heart a romantic passion for a woman whom he could never hope to marry, whom he had pledged himself never again to speak to with any selfish personal aim? Did not this very difficulty with regard to Susanna now come in his way as an advantage, showing him how alone he could extricate himself with honour from a false position, and leave Lucy absolutely free from the thought that he still clung to her image? But he did not love Susanna; no, nor did he feel sure that he ever would if he married her. But he thought she would be a kind, devoted wife; and personally she was esteemed very beautiful; and then her little property, combined with his own talent and persevering industry, might give them that kind of start in life which would, he believed, ensure worldly success; and so gratify Susanna's chief foible, display, which Guy was already conscious of. He weighed these ideas over and over in his mind, and, though they never grew attractive, they did seem to be convincing; but he waited for the answer from Lucy before he decided. He seemed to fancy that out of her letter would grow something definite one way or the other.

Thirteen days had now passed. It was Sunday. Susanna had asked him, though apparently with great reluctance and with a pretty confession of religious interest in his welfare, to go to church that day. She did not say with her, but Guy understood it meant that. He had not for a very long period been inside the walls of such a place, and felt a little uncomfortable at the idea of going now. Then again, he did not like to be seen there for the first time with Susanna ; it seemed so like an open acknowledgment of his destiny. Yet why should this be so ? Did not everybody know they were members of the same family ? True ; but Guy felt sure for all that the incident would set tongues going. But he had not absolutely refused when she proposed it ; and at breakfast she looked so fascinating in her new rose-coloured silk dress, and was so blushingly confused and yet so obviously delighted at Phœbe's proposition that she should take Guy with her, and she looked so archly at him as she replied to Phœbe, ' Oh, but he won't go, because I asked him,' that Guy resigned the contest and prepared himself by putting on his new suit, which he had just bought,

as the first-fruits of his and his father's recent industry which he had consented to take unto himself.

So they went to church together; and nothing certainly could surpass Susanna's behaviour on so critical an occasion. She said very little to Guy, but for every acquaintance they met she had a smile, and a half blush, and a soft word that seemed to tell a whole history. Before they were fairly seated in the comfortable little pew to which Mr. Joshua Darkley took them, as soon as he had got over his surprise, half the congregation were making up their minds that Guy and Susanna had settled it at last; and they would not have been very much astonished if, that same morning, before the close of the service, they had heard the banns formally announced.

And how sweetly attentive Susanna was to every bit of the service! How careful to help Guy to find in advance the right place in his prayer-book (for it must be confessed he had almost forgotten himself how to do so without blundering)! How fervently and just audibly she made all the responses! With what rapt expression she gazed on the minister through the whole of his not very exciting sermon!

And when she joined the choir in singing, Guy himself was surprised to discover that Susanna had so good a voice and sang so well.

On coming out of church, Mr. Darkley ran after them, saying to Guy—

‘This letter came for you by the post this morning. And as you didn’t come to me, as usual, to ask if there was anything, I thought I’d bring it to your place after service. Good-by! I must run back again to help the minister.’

Guy, we may observe, had desired his letter should be left for him at Mr. Darkley’s—not because he had any dread that it would be tampered with at home, but that he could not bear that Lucy’s letter should be there looked at, handled, and talked about. The first glance at the superscription told him that he might have spared himself the fear. It was not from Lucy, but from the squire, whose tremulous handwriting Guy knew. He put it into his pocket, and said nothing on the subject to Susanna. On the contrary, he seemed to be ready to speak of everything but that to her. He had been very silent on the way to the church, but now he became uncommonly

talkative in the walk from it. He grew almost excited at the beauty of the landscape in a particular direction, and at the conduct of some village poor-law functionary whose doings Susanna happened to touch on. But then suddenly, between these fits of chat, there would be deep, almost painful, silence. Susanna would have given half the treasures of her mother's boxes to know what the letter was about. Of course, neither Guy nor Phœbe had told her of Mr. Pample's doings. She had a strong conviction that, somehow or other, she was particularly interested in the letter, and she had seen it was not written in a female hand ; beyond that she could be sure of nothing, though suspecting much.

As soon as Guy had seen Susanna inside the door of the house, he slipped away to a secret part of the common, where a little stream, with picturesquely-wooded, deeply-sloping banks, with the yellow furze still in bloom, ran through it. He threw himself down on the sward, and tore the letter open, which was dated from Chamouni in Switzerland, and ran thus :—

‘ GUY WATERMAN,—I have received your letter,

and read it with great surprise. But for my respect to your mother, I do not think I should have answered it at all, or at least not in this way.'

Guy's cheeks began to burn, but he mastered the growing emotion, and read on.

'I should have thought you had seen enough in your own conduct of late to have demanded all your zeal and energy for the business of reprobation and improvement, whether you regarded your own interests or mine. I am sorry to say I know now your motives only too well. I shall not stigmatize them as they deserve; time and your own conscience will probably be only too severe in punishment. I have only two things to add, and both at the desire of my niece. She did as you requested her before explaining to me the nature of your communication; and, of course, learned from me that Mr. Pample had acted under my instructions on the night in question; and she was, like myself, appalled that so young a man could have been so old in the belief of infamy, and so prompt to act recklessly with regard to the good name of honourable men. The other thing is

this—my niece requests that any further communication you may have to make may be direct to me, not through her.

‘GODFREY DALRYMPLE.’

Guy's face gradually lost all its sudden flush of resentful colour, and grew whiter and whiter every instant as he read. When he had done, he bent his head over his knees, and thus sat long, holding the letter in his hand, and with shut eyes. He was at first completely stunned, and seemed only able to dwell on the bitter solitude of his lot, on all the humiliation of his fate. He didn't understand his suffering, nor its cause. It seemed henceforward as though it was not worth while to try to understand it. He had thought to warn and benefit the squire, and was now himself looked on as a base slanderer. He had hoped to have had one kind word from Lucy that he could have comprehended, as showing she understood the reality and magnitude of his self-sacrifice, and she did not even condescend to contradict the steward's hint about her marriage. Oh! what a fool he had been! What a senseless fool!

But he could not think. He knew he should go mad if he attempted it. He could only feel. The contempt and indignation that breathed through every word of the squire's letter sank deeper and deeper into his soul, till he began almost to accept the imputation that he was a rascal, and that the fact had better be at once acknowledged. Could he deny that he had hoped something from Lucy might arise out of this affair?—that he had thought even Mr. Pample's crime had promised to benefit him, Guy, in connection with his insane dreams of a future for himself and Lucy? No; and how, then, could he be sure that under such temptations he had not done just what the squire believed—allowed his judgment to be warped, his moral principles to be overthrown, and his whole character to be suddenly poisoned?

While he thus lay hour after hour, unconscious of the lapse of time, still drinking in only deeper and deeper draughts of anguish and despair, some one spoke to him. Guy looked up. It was Susanna.

‘Oh, Guy—dear Guy—what is the matter? Do tell me. You look so ill.’

Guy smiled a ghastly smile, as he replied,

‘Pooh—pooh—nonsense. The day’s a little close, that’s all; I shall be in soon. Don’t wait.’

‘Oh, I know it’s that nasty letter—I am sure it is; and I shan’t leave you alone with it any longer. So give me the letter, or else come along yourself,’ said Susanna, with a seeming attempt to laugh, but not disguising her anxious thoughts as she looked in his face.

‘The letter! oh, well, as to the letter—we’ll soon settle that.’ And Guy began deliberately to tear it up, and throw the fragments into the water. ‘And so you don’t like the letter?’ said he, a moment after to Susanna, with a strange expression in his face.

‘No, I am sure I don’t. I hate it,’ said Susanna, with a pretty expression of what she conceived her hatred ought to be.

‘Not if I tell you that you are very much concerned in it, and may be angry with yourself for blaming it, when you know how?’

‘I! Guy. I concerned in it—how can that be?’

And Susanna sat down, in a most charming attitude, by his side, to enable him to express himself at his leisure, and to enable her better to hear what he said.

‘Well, do you know that this letter has cleared up some things while it has darkened others. And, to begin with, it tells me to ask you this,—Would you like me for a husband?’

‘Oh, Guy!’ was all Susanna replied to so sudden a question; but as she looked down, and blushed becomingly, the words didn’t much matter.

‘But mind,’ he went on, ‘let us be all fair and above board. You shall know the truth. I have liked somebody else better than I like you, so, if that’s an obstacle, say so, like a brave girl, at once; I shan’t be offended.’

But Susanna did not say anything of the kind. On the contrary, she could not repress just one little smile, the precise meaning of which we will not investigate, for it disappeared and did not again venture to the light of day. Presently, Guy heard Susanna sobbing as she turned away her head from him.

‘Come now, Susanna, be frank with me. You suspected this long ago, didn’t you?’

‘Yes,’ sobbed Susanna.

‘And, therefore, if you did care for me still, in spite of knowing it—’

‘Oh, Guy, I couldn’t help it—I couldn’t, indeed!’ interrupted Susanna, with streaming eyes.

‘Well then, say the word, will you have me? I’ll try to be a good husband. Will you have me?’

‘Oh, I will! I will, and love you very much, and try to be a good wife to you!’

‘There’s my hand, then. Now give me a kiss.’

Susanna, nothing loth, did so, as he wound an arm round her waist; and then, with the same cool deliberateness that characterized the whole proceeding, Guy and Susanna began to talk of their future arrangements.

But more than once, while Susanna grew extremely animated in discussing the details, she had to repeat to him what she had said; and when they had done and were going back towards the cottage she was startled by the ghastly look of his face. She made no comment, however, but preserved the same aspect

of unclouded felicity that had seemed to fill her whole atmosphere ever since Guy had spoken so very much to the purpose.

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Guy was again after a week's hard work sitting among the furze bushes by the stream on a Sunday afternoon, sadly reviewing the past, and gloomily contemplating the future.

'Well,' said he to himself, 'what next? Things are a bit more comfortable at home, and I have settled with Susanna. But there's an unpleasant job to do, which I know must be done, and yet which I turn from with disgust. I must go to that man Pample, must acknowledge I did him wrong, tell him of my letter to the squire, and bear patiently whatever he may say in return. Of course he'll abuse me, but I must bear that. I only wish I had myself more confidence in his honesty. I could do it then, and do it as it ought to be done. But I have no right to doubt him. The squire said as plainly as words could say it he knew of the whole transaction. I wonder,' continued he, musingly, 'how that mysterious bit of paper is to be explained.'

Perhaps he'll tell me. I should tell him if we could reverse situations; I am very sure of that. Well, I think I had better go at once and have done with it. I cannot conveniently go except on a Sunday, and if I miss to-day a week will be lost. I ought to have seen him on Monday last, the very day after getting the letter, but I could not. And I own I was glad of the excuse that I could not spare a working day so as to get more time to reflect. But I'll go now.'

Guy rose and went towards the house to get the mysterious bit of paper that had given him so much matter for speculation. He had confided it to his mother for safety. On his way he met Susanna, smiling coquettishly upon him, and then bridling up in virgin modesty and reserve, as though she regretted having allowed him incautiously to surprise her true feelings.

'Shall we have a walk, dear?' she asked.

'Thank you, Susanna, not now. I have a little matter of business to settle at the Hall which must be done to-day, as I have no time on other days.'

'Well, but mayn't I walk part of the way with

you, and then wait for your return? Do let me!’

‘I’d rather you didn’t,’ said Guy, bluntly. ‘This belongs to my old life, and you musn’t meddle with that. The new life belongs to you. That’s our bargain, you know.’

‘Oh, yes!’ said Susanna, her eyes sparkling with such real or assumed pleasure that Guy could not but notice their glitter; ‘but you’ll try to get back in time for us to have a walk this evening, won’t you? and I don’t like to go anywhere by myself now.’

‘Well, I’ll try, but I don’t promise.’

‘No—I know—because you always keep your promise when you have made ^{one},’ said Susanna, looking at him, not with any definable expression in the face, nor with any peculiar tone in the voice; but somehow the remark jarred on Guy, and seemed to mean more than he could bear to reflect on. Suddenly he looked from her, saying,

‘Good-by, Susanna,’ and, without waiting for a reply, strode off.

Susanna stood for a few seconds looking after

him, the smile dying out from her face, and the laughing glitter in the eye becoming cold without losing brightness, as she murmured to herself,

‘Miss Lucy, again, of course! Well, never mind now. I can wait. O yes, I can wait.’ The thin lips played nervously, and lost for a moment their ordinarily vivid hue, as though struggling to keep down rebellious, dangerous speech; but Susanna said no more, and began to move slowly along the grass in the same direction Guy had gone, looking after him; and, as she looked and followed, her step seemed unconsciously to grow more stealthy, her form more bent and concentrated, and her old attitude and gesture to suggest in some undefinable way the idea of a delicately sleek and beautiful wild animal cautiously tracking its prey, only a few moments before it expects to crouch for a final spring.

CHAPTER XIII.

GUY WHITEWASHES MR. PAMPLE'S CHARACTER.

'MOTHER,' said Guy, as he got into Phœbe's chamber, 'give me that paper. I have made up my mind to tell the steward all and beg his pardon.'

'Guy,' answered Phœbe, speaking with extreme slowness and feebleness, 'I cannot think what made you do so foolish a thing as destroy the squire's letter before showing it to me. I don't feel at all satisfied.'

'But unluckily I do. I know the squire's hand as well as I know my own. It wasn't a pleasant letter to keep.'

Phœbe was too ill to discuss the matter further. Even while she spoke she had been bathing her temples with vinegar and water to get rid of the cold deathly perspiration upon them. So she took the scrap of paper from a little pocket-

book in her bosom and gave it to him, faintly murmuring,

'O Guy, I didn't think this affair would ha' ended like this. We have lost the squire now for ever, I suppose? But 't isn't for myself I mind—I shan't be here much longer—but for you, Guy.' And Phœbe, to Guy's surprise, burst into tears, which she was unable for a long time to repress.

'For me, mother? What on earth do I care? Well I don't exactly mean that, for I like the squire, and I don't particularly enjoy his bad opinion, but still, mother, don't be afraid of me. I can work, and I will work, and be indebted to no one. No, no, you won't catch me at the old game again. So don't be frightened. Come, cheer up. Give me a kiss. Dry your foolish tears, for they are foolish; and you a very foolish mother altogether, but that can't be helped; so I must make the best of you.' Guy said all this in a tone and with a manner of such unmistakable fondness that any ordinary mother would certainly not have misunderstood him nor have played with his words, except in a spirit of affectionate and reciprocal

enjoyment. But Phœbe, caught in questioning alarm at his phrase,

‘You must make the best of me, Guy?’—then, seeming to remember herself, she laughed and cried, and said with inexplicable bitterness of tone to him, ‘O yes, to be sure, you must make the best of me.’

‘Why, mother, what does all this mean?’

‘Nothing, nothing, only I am low and spiritless. You’ve got the paper; go and get rid of it, I shall be better when you come back.’

‘I hope so, or I shall take very sharp measures with you, indeed,’ said Guy, pushing aside the grey hairs from her forehead, and looking with deep earnestness into her face, which he again kissed. ‘I can’t afford to have your illness on my shoulders, in addition to all my other misdeeds. Now can I? I don’t say I ought not, I only say I can’t. You won’t let me, will you?’

‘No, no, my darling; my heart’s own precious darling! I won’t if I can help it. And I’ll try to help it, and I’ll do what you say. I’ll go out as soon as you and father can get me a chair. There,

now go along, and tell that rogue what an honest man he is proved to be.'

'What! you still think him a rogue?'

'Would he ha' bribed you as he did, by the idea of running away with Miss Lucy, if he were not?'

'Well, mother, you musn't say so—whatever you may think; and, for my part, I own we have now no right to treat him as guilty. That's clear enough.'

Two hours after this dialogue Guy met Mr. Pample in the park, near the Hall. He was seated under one of the magnificent oaks that studded the park at intervals, each occupying a vast stretch of ground, and including a perfect world of branches, foliage, and fruit; birds, animals, and insects. Two squirrels were then at play on a branch over Mr. Pample's head, and he could not help interrupting the ceaseless stream of anxious thought to watch them. But hearing a step he turned, and Guy stood before him, baring and bowing his head for a moment, and then standing still, erect, and with a very pale but composed face.

Mr. Pample stared, looked about to see that no other persons were within earshot, then, without

either smile or frown, waited in rigid silence to know what might be coming.

‘I have, sir, unintentionally done you a great wrong, and I come to offer you any suitable remedy you may please to ask.’

‘A wrong! what is that?’ Then Mr. Pample added, ‘Won’t you sit down?’

But Guy, standing where he was, continued—

‘The night of my confinement at the Hall I passed through your outer room on my way out. While watching an opportunity to pass unnoticed the partly-open door of your inner room I overheard a conversation which I should have had no wish to listen to, but that—that—I heard a name mentioned.’

‘Miss Lucy’s, yes, I understand;’ and here Mr. Pample poured the full radiance of his very sweetest smile on Guy’s face; though his eyes, by their stern and suspicious expression, seemed to be engaged in quite other business, and the contradiction between the two had an odd effect. Guy’s face crimsoned more with anger than pleasure, but he took no other notice of the interruption.

‘Well, sir, in that conversation I heard things

that surprised me about the squire and Miss Lucy ; and, to confess the ugly truth, I doubted you were not dealing honestly with the squire.'

'Why, Guy, this is positively amusing ; but I think you have always fancied yourself a bit of a pet of the family, and so entitled to take liberties with it, and with all belonging to it, eh ?'

'I thought as I have said, sir ; and I am now ashamed to have it to say. So when you left the room to show the stranger to bed I thought I would carry something with me that should prove I'd been in the room at the time. I took this, sir,' Guy handed the memorandum to Mr. Pample, who said, with an air of great wonder,

'This? What on earth is it?' Then, looking at it as if puzzled, and as if trying to recall what it could have meant, he burst out into a loud laugh, as he exclaimed, 'Oh, to be sure, I recollect !' Then, composing his features, which still seemed inclined to break out into a grin at the recollection of Guy's absurd mistake, he said, 'Well ?'

Guy waited a single instant, hoping Mr. Pample would vouchsafe some explanation ; but he did not,

he merely repeated his former word, while carelessly folding the paper, and putting it, as if without thought, into his waistcoat pocket, 'Well?'

'The day I ran against you in the courtyard I had come with the intention to see the squire, and give him that paper in your presence.'

'And why didn't you? Oh, I remember. He went off while you were fetching me a chair after knocking me down so summarily.'

'After that I wrote to Mr. Dalrymple—'

'Directly to him?' inquired Mr. Pample, with seeming interest.

'No.'

'Go on. I understand.' Again Mr. Pample smiled in that irritatingly confidential manner of his, whenever his thoughts obviously glanced at Lucy.

'And in due time I received his answer.'

'Also indirectly?' asked Mr. Pample, with a strange meaning in his look and tone.

'No, he answered me himself, and satisfied me I had been mistaken.'

'Really! You found him good enough to think me an honest man?'

'Yes.'

'And you are good enough to believe him?'

'Yes,' said Guy, after a moment's hesitation, which he could not for the life of him help.

'And have you expressed those opinions or shown this paper to anybody else?'

'Only to my mother.'

'Ah, poor Mrs. Waterman lies bedridden, I think?'

'Yes.'

'Pray can you show me the squire's letter?'

'No, I destroyed it.'

'Quite right, quite right! And now see how I shall treat you. As you have destroyed his letter so I will destroy this absurd paper, that it may not again be brought up to annoy you.' And as he said so he acted, taking the paper from his pocket and tearing it up into small bits and letting them fly off with the breeze, which scattered them abroad so as to make the business of restoration a hopeless one if Guy had been inclined to make the attempt. He was at once startled and alarmed by the incident. But what could he say? Nothing. Mr. Pample

did not give him time for lengthened or dangerous reflection.'

'Have you thought any more of what I said to you about a certain young lady?' he asked.

'Whether I have or not,' said Guy, 'I may as well tell you that I'm going to be married in a few weeks to Susanna Beck.'

'The more fool you!' remarked Mr. Pample.

'Sir!' exclaimed Guy, giving way for the first time to a momentary explosion of the intense disgust and indignation Mr. Pample's whole manner excited.'

'I say nothing against the young person you have chosen. I only wonder at your neglect of the lady you might have chosen, and at your indifference to the feelings she must experience to know that she has stooped to woo and been rejected.'

'Stooped!' repeated Guy, and with a still more menacing look, though he was also confused by the new view given to him of Lucy's position.

'Well, well, you know what I mean. You are simply a mechanic—she is a lady, and an heiress. But, having got rid of one quarrel, don't let's begin another. I wish you well. If I did not, I should

not have spoken as I have. I wish Miss Dalrymple well, too, and hope this unlucky business may not spoil her chance for a suitable marriage. Come, shake hands in true English fashion, and let us go our several ways.' He held out his hand, and Guy took it. And so they parted. And so long as Guy's retreating figure remained in sight, Mr. Pample neither spoke nor moved from his seat. He did not even seem to be thinking of him, but busied himself once more in the doings of the squirrels. But the very instant the dark speck disappeared behind the trees there was a low chuckle and an accompanying inward comment,

'What an innocent young fool it is! One's half ashamed of the occupation of administering spoon meat to such babes. Perhaps, after all, the shortest way would be to tell him that his absence from this country before the squire's return would be convenient, and leave him to work out the details; he'd do it—tell him only 'tis for Miss Lucy's sake. Let me see.'

Mr. Pample returned to his seat under the oak to think.

It would not be easy to track all the devious windings of that busy brain, that was at work there for an hour or more under the oak after Guy's departure ; and it might be unjust to Mr. Pample to recall in minute detail the many images of violence that from time to time came temptingly forward—were looked at—and dismissed as too dangerous ; for, after all, Mr. Pample did not adopt them. He was not fond of violence ; nor, if the truth be told, was he exactly of the stuff that can hope successfully to go through such perilous undertakings. But he did at last make up his mind to do something, and suddenly. He went to the stables, had his horse brought out, and set off to the village. Slowly he cantered through it, as if in search of nobody in particular, and yet as if he wanted something. He passed the Watermans' cottage, but saw only Phoebe, whose face scowled at him from her couch by the window. He went on, took a turn round across the common at the back ; did not anywhere see Guy, so again went towards the cottage, this time at a walk. His perseverance was rewarded — he caught a glimpse of Guy and Susanna at the end of a short

lane, where there was a stile dividing the lane from a field of rich-looking pasture. Mr. Pample moved down the lane to meet them. As he reached the spot, the lady was getting over the stile with Guy's assistance; and it was remarkable how long she was about it, and how timid and ashamed she seemed, when a pretty ancle and leg were a little unduly revealed in the process. Of course, she could not help blushing, and looking Guy in the face, who coloured, too, though rather at her thoughts than his own.

'Mr. Waterman,' said Mr. Pample, who now, for the first time in his life, addressed Guy in this respectful manner, 'will you favour me with a few minutes more? I had something to say which I forgot till you had left me.'

Guy hesitated, for he really was sick of Mr. Pample; but he said, after a glance at Susanna, as though she had been his difficulty,

'Oh, certainly. Perhaps, Susanna, you'll excuse me.' Susanna smiled on him benignantly, as though having but one idea in the world—namely, that every act or thought of Guy's must be right; then

looked inquisitively at Mr. Pample, curtsied to him as though not sure whether he was or would become a decided friend or a decided enemy, and then glided off, with just one look out of the corner of her eyes to see if Guy was watching her, which, unluckily, he was not.

Mr. Pample fastened his horse to the bars of the stile, seated himself on the top with his foot on the lower step, and began to talk to Guy, who at first stood a little aloof; but, feeling the constraint of the position, gradually edged himself towards the horse, and patted it, and leaned with his back against it, while the conversation went on.

‘Mr. Waterman,’ said the steward in an impressive voice, ‘I am now going to speak to you—without authority I acknowledge—in behalf of a young lady in whose interests and welfare I feel the very deepest concern. No,’ said he, seeing Guy’s sudden agitation and growing anger, ‘don’t mistake me. My object now is the very opposite of that you attribute to me. It is useless to conceal from you, even if you do not yourself already know it, that Miss Dalrymple has allowed herself to think of you in a

manner highly threatening to her future peace. Of course I don't mean to say she is so weak as to give way to any such feelings. But there they are, and the question is, are they to be allowed quietly to die out, or are they to be violently stimulated into new life by compelling her to see you continually, and, what is still worse, to see your bride? I say nothing of the squire's intended views and feelings, though you can guess what they must be. But as to Miss Lucy I do say that, if you are not blamable for what has been, you will be most culpable for that which may yet occur if you don't adopt some timely remedy.'

'And that is—?' inquired Guy, in a quiet tone, but the scorn and suspicion of which did not escape Mr. Pample.

'To act as a gentleman would: consider the lady's natural feelings, and not expose her to unnecessary suffering.'

'We might agree in that, sir, perhaps,' observed Guy, still in the same tone; 'but you have, I imagine, some advice to offer, some special hint to give me?'

'I? O Lord, no! Surely you are the best judge of what ought to be done. I only want to

convince you something should be done. I venture no further.'

Guy was silent for a little while. Again he had been mistaken, possibly again unjust to the steward. It is always difficult to avoid being unjust in one's estimate of those whom we dislike. But at last he said, with a very perceptible change of tone, and as though himself deliberating seriously on the matter,

'I suppose, sir, you think the marriage should not take place here?'

'Indeed, I think nothing of the kind. Of course it must take place here; but I think it should be before Miss Dalrymple returns.'

'Yes, yes,' hurriedly responded Guy.

'And I think if you could avoid, after your marriage, living quite so near, where you are in danger of being hourly thrown across her path—'

'It's not so easy,' said Guy, with a gloomy expression of the tone and features, 'to go into a new place, and make new friends, and get new chances for success in business.'

'No, that is quite true; and you are right to think of yourself.'

But, as it happened that Guy was thinking of anything but himself, he replied,

‘I have at times had a half-mind to go abroad. There is a distant relative of ours in the West Indies. I am sick of this place, though I was born here, and though—’

Guy stopped, looking round with a softening eye on the fair landscape now all aglow in the setting sun. He felt that which it was impossible to speak of to Mr. Pample, and he said no more.

‘But your mother?’

‘Perhaps the voyage would do her good. There doesn't seem to be anything particular the matter with her—any disease, only a constant wasting away. I don't know, perhaps the voyage and the fresh place and the fresh people would do her good.’

‘Well, if you should think any more of it, I could render you good service at no sort of cost to myself. I happen to be able to get a warm letter of introduction written to the Governor of either of our colonies, and I could say that for you which would ensure a kind reception and a capital start.’

‘Indeed, sir,’ said Guy, looking at Mr.

Pample, dreamily, as if the whole force of what he had said was slowly but surely working into his brain and rousing there fresh and attractive images.

‘Yes; that I can do. But don’t forget that my business with you was not to advise this or any particular measure. You are your own master. Only I say—and this I am delighted to perceive you agree in—that, whatever can be done for Miss Dalrymple’s future peace ought to be done.’

‘It shall be, sir,’ said Guy, grasping Mr. Pample’s outstretched hand for the first time with cordial feeling. Mr. Pample loosed his horse, mounted, wished Guy good-night, trotted up the lane, repassed the cottage, saw Susanna, gave her a most flattering smile and bow, and disappeared, very well pleased indeed with his evening’s work.

But what carriage is that which he presently sees, labouring on far away in front, just dimly visible in the evening dusk, rolling through the hollow road where it passes between the deep banks? A travelling-carriage loaded with trunks. Surely, it cannot be the squire’s? He would never return

thus suddenly, without any kind of notice. And yet, if not his, whose? Mr. Pample remembered nothing in connection with the known movements of neighbouring families that at all agreed with what he saw. The perspiration broke out on his face and brow, as he spurred his heavy horse faster on. The carriage would reach the entrance-gate soon. If it stopped there—The steward did not dare to finish his half-formed thought, but spurred on and on to get nearer, on account of the windings of the road, so that the carriage might not get out of his range of vision at the very moment of its reaching, entering, or passing by the lodge-gate.

He was just in time round the last corner. The carriage stopped opposite the lodge, Mr. Pample felt as though his heart stopped too. But stay, perhaps it is only to ask a question. No, it turns, passes through the gates, and rolls towards Bran-hape Hall.

‘Ruin! ruin! absolute ruin!’ murmured the steward, keeping with difficulty on his horse; his whole being paralysed with the sudden shock.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. PAMPLE IN HIS ROOM ONCE MORE.

MR. PAMPLE rode on till he reached the lodge, where the portress was just closing the gates, but reopened them, seeing him. As she curtsied for him to pass, he said,

‘What carriage was that went in just now?’

‘It’s the squire, sir, and the young lady.’

Of course it was; Mr. Pample’s ill-divining soul had told him that plainly enough, though he had tried to disbelieve.

What should he do? Turn his horse and flee, leaving his character to take care of itself? But was it quite certain he could escape, even if he attempted it? He was unprovided with funds where he then was away from the Hall; and whatever command of money his position gave him would cease the instant it was known that he was a fugi-

tive. Besides, was he to give up the game so soon, and in such cowardly fashion? How did he know but the squire was even at that moment waiting, ready to laugh at having so surprised him, and wondering why he did not come to greet him?

But it was no use thinking thus. The sudden return, unannounced, must mean mischief. But how? and to what extent? Had he not better risk facing the squire, and so at least be sure he had not created the danger he feared?

Two or three times he stopped, vacillating in purpose; never actually going back, but constantly looking back, as if seeking inspiration from what he could see in that direction. But at last he struck the spurs into his horse, which gave a great bound, nearly throwing the rider off, then heavily dashed on towards the Hall.

As he approached he saw there was great commotion—lights flickering past the windows, servants hurrying about, while one man came riding round from the stableyard and trotted off at great speed in the direction of the village; meaning, no doubt, to get out of the park by a little gate that had been

made some years back in the wall there, as a nearer route to the village.

‘That is to fetch Guy Waterman,’ thought Mr. Pample; and once more he could with difficulty resist the impulse to turn and make the best of the time while he had his freedom. But he had been seen by some of the servants; he determined to go on and know the worst.

‘So, John,’ said he to the man who met him in the courtyard and advanced to take his horse, ‘the squire has come?’

‘Yes, sir, and he’s asking particularly for you.’

‘I’ll go to him directly. Where’s Reuben going on horseback?’

‘Don’t know, sir.’

‘And where is the squire?’

‘In your room, sir, I think.’

Another warning! But somehow Mr. Pample’s courage and audacity were failing him. He still found it easier to hope than to act. But he said—

‘Don’t put the horse up. Wait here a bit. I shall probably, now the squire is home again, go to my own house to-night.’ The man said nothing,

and Mr. Pample did not like to repeat the order. He went into the house, and as he went he saw, to his intense alarm, the man look after him, and then at once, in defiance of his orders, lead the horse to the stables. 'Has he had previous orders?' Mr. Pample asked himself with no enviable feelings.

He went straight to his own rooms, catching by the way a glimpse in the corridor of Mrs. Hammett, who either did not or would not see him, but swept with all her flowing Sunday drapery into another passage out of his course. There was a servant in livery in the outer room, who looked flustered, seemed doing nothing in particular, but did not go away. Mr. Pample did not speak to him, for he was doing his utmost to collect his thoughts and energies for one last struggle as soon as he should know whence and how danger threatened. He advanced into the inner room. The servant then followed him, and said,

'The squire will be here directly, sir, he told me to say;' he then went out, closed the door, and locked it after him.

Locked it! Could it be? Mr. Pample ran to

the door, checked his fierce agitation for a moment, while he calmly and noiselessly tried it, and found it was indeed locked—he was a prisoner! He ran to the windows; they were too high, and there was no staircase there as in the outer room. How vividly Mr. Pample now recollected that night of Guy's escape! How sure he was that all this strange treatment was only a logical conclusion from it.

Well, he could not get off, so attempts at escape would be useless and compromising. He could not expect to persuade the servant to open the door—not even by bribes—and the very attempt might be listened to by others, for he fancied he heard fresh steps moving without. It was equally useless to stand upon his dignity, and clamour for release from his very undignified position. No, he must wait. How long? For what? Probably while Guy was fetched from the village.

He gnashed his teeth impotently, then tried to look over the papers on his table, and in his drawers to see if there were any that ought not to be seen. He tore up several which he could recognize in the

growing darkness, but it was with a half-careless desperation, as if conscious it was useless; that larger questions now would decide his destiny.

One quarter of an hour passed—then another—then another; each seeming to involve an age of anguish; and at last the great clock in the turret struck. Nine! As the deep vibrations of the bell ceased he heard the trotting of a horse, then a ring at the bell of the porch, and then again there was intense, terrible silence.

Would the squire see Guy, and hear all before seeing him? If so, that destroyed what little chance might otherwise have existed. Ah no; they are coming, as though they waited but for that visitor whoever he may be. Perhaps, after all, it is not Guy, but an officer of justice to arrest him.

The door opens; the room becomes suddenly light. A servant enters with two tall silver candlesticks; puts them on the table, and goes out. A pause. Then Mr. Dalrymple appears—white headed—and very old-looking, but firm and stately. Mr. Pample's blood freezes at the look given him, but he smiles once more—it will be for the last time

perhaps—and holds out his hand with an exclamation of joy—

‘My dear sir!’

‘Sit down, Mr. Pample, if you please. There, sir!’ said he, still more sternly, pointing to a chair, seeing that he had not been obeyed. Mr. Pample dropped into it, and gazed furtively round to note who else were coming in. Miss Lucy Dalrymple came first, looking sad and frightened, but evidently stronger in health; then Mrs. Hammett; and then—Guy Waterman.

The two ladies sat down near to the squire, who took a position at the head of the table. He was very quiet, did not say an unnecessary word, but for that very reason Mr. Pample only feared him the more.

‘Guy,’ said the squire, after a pause, and in his deep, rich, impressive tones, ‘do you know the writer of this?’ He handed to Guy a small shabby-looking note. Guy read the address—‘Mrs. Hammett, at the Hall, Branhape’—and said,

‘Yes, sir; it is my mother’s writing.’

‘Do you know the contents?’

‘I do not, sir.’

‘Read! Read it aloud!’ Guy read as follows:—

‘DEAR MADAM,—Please excuse the liberty I am taking. I am very uneasy in my mind. Can you tell me if the squire received a note from Guy on matters of great consequence to the squire’s interests, and if he answered it as if he were deeply offended, and had a very bad opinion of Guy for having written it? Pray tell me this. I am too ill to come to you. In Christian charity I ask it. The poor lad feels deeply his treatment, though he says nothing. I must not at present write any more.

‘From, dear madam,

‘Your obedient servant,

‘PHEBE WATERMAN.’

‘And did you know nothing of this, suspect nothing?’ asked the squire.

‘On my honour, sir, no,’ replied Guy.

‘And when you received this, Mrs. Hammett, what did you do?’

‘Well, sir, I was a good deal troubled. I didn’t like to suspect—and yet—’

‘Speak out, Mrs. Hammett; I need hardly say that the innocent can have nothing to fear from your statements.’

‘Well, sir,’ said Mrs. Hammett, looking greatly troubled, and turning a little away, so that she might not be obliged to see Mr. Pample’s nervous, quivering features, now the very picture of guilty fright; ‘well, sir, the young man had been to me previously with a letter, which he was anxious to get to Miss Lucy.’

‘For me, Mrs. Hammett?’ asked Lucy, the colour rising in her cheeks through the previously pale surface.

‘Well, it was for you, but only, so I understood, that you might get it to the squire. He urged me not to let Mr. Pample know anything about it, and, though I hate underhand proceedings, he persuaded me.’

‘And you sent that letter to me?’ asked the squire.

‘I did, sir; I put it in the mail-bag myself, and saw the lad leave the Hall with it,’ replied Mrs. Hammett.

‘I never received it.’

‘Sir!’ exclaimed Guy in astonishment, but stopped, seeing all eyes upon him. Mr. Dalrymple nodded to him, and said—

‘Wait!’ and bade Mrs. Hammett go on.

‘When I received this second application, and from the young man’s mother, I got very anxious. So I went myself to the post-office at Plackett, which is you know, sir, the nearest post-town, and there posted Mrs. Waterman’s letter, so as to be quite certain that it must reach you.’

‘Now, Guy,’ said the squire, ‘please to step forward. What was the purport of this letter that you forwarded to me with so much precaution?’

Guy paused, for he was confounded by the discovery that his letter had never reached—had never been answered by the squire, and that all the painful thoughts and feelings aroused by it had arisen on a false basis. He hardly knew for the moment the extent of the influence he had thus been under. He could not disentangle suddenly the false from the true, even to understand how this

affected Lucy's relations with him. But the squire waited for his answer. So at last he said—

‘Forgive me, sir; I am so much surprised by what I have just now heard, and I have been previously so much affected by the letter that I thought you had written to me, that I am unwilling to repeat all that I wrote until—’ He stopped, scarcely knowing what he was saying, conscious that Lucy's eyes were upon him; but suddenly he added, ‘Did you, sir, sign a mortgage for above 16,000*l.* on the night of my confinement here?’

Mr. Dalrymple stared for a moment speechlessly at Guy, and then at Mr. Pample: ‘Sixteen thousand pounds! My God! No.’

‘Then, sir, he did for you. Let him deny it if he can.’

All eyes turned to Mr. Pample. Rage, shame, fear, and intolerable pain distorted his features, in spite of the assumed calmness he tried to maintain.

‘Is it true?’ Mr. Dalrymple asked. There was a deep silence. Every head bent forward to hear the low, scarcely audible, reply—

‘It is!’

We need not dwell on what passed during the next few minutes. If the squire forgot his magisterial capacity while remembering only his losses or possible losses, and the incredible ingratitude of the wretch in whom he had so deeply confided; if rapid and bitter, and excited questionings were followed by incoherent or partial replies; if there was a brief time of noisy, confused, and passionate excitement, it soon passed away; and the squire, dismissing every one else from the room, sat down to measure the extent of his losses with the criminal, disdaining, however, one word of reference to any matters but the exact business before them. Pencil in hand, he prepared to note down the answers.

‘ You received this money, 16,500*l*. ? ’

‘ Yes.’

‘ Any of it left ? ’

‘ 1,500*l*., with a trifle more in my own name at the bank.’

‘ And the mortgagees are ?—’

‘ Stanford and Co.’

‘ What else ?’

‘There is a deficiency in my account of nearly 10,000*l*.’

The squire smiled grimly, but said nothing more than ‘Go on !’

‘I have sold out certain sums in the Funds, and paid the dividends myself—altogether, I think, about 22,000*l*.’

‘Yes.’

‘And there is another property—the Ten Fields—mortgaged for 10,000*l*.’

‘Yes,’ said the squire, looking up from his writing, with wondrous patience.

‘That’s all, sir.’

The squire ran up his figures, and breathed again as he found that he was not absolutely ruined, at the worst.

‘And the assets?’

‘Well, sir, what with shares, and houses, and other investments, I think you will recover a considerable sum. I wish it was more, sir ; and if you will allow me—’

‘How much?’ thundered the squire.

‘Eight or nine thousand pounds, sir,’ faltered the steward.

‘Have you any record of these things?—prepared not for me, but for yourself?’

Mr. Pample went to a drawer, opened it, took out a piece of wood at the far end, and then from a vacant place in the woodwork of the table, produced a little ledger, locked. He handed it to the squire, with a key which he took from the bottom of the watch-pocket in his trousers, and said—

‘I have been very guilty, sir, but I will do all I can. In that book is recorded every transaction in which I have been engaged; not so stated as to be clear without the explanations I have given to you, but which, with them, will enable you—or—or your solicitors to obtain full satisfaction.’

The squire took the ledger and key, rose, went towards the door, unlocked it (for he had previously locked it), went out, locked the door after him, and the last Mr. Pample could hear of him was an order to the servants, ‘If he attempts to leave the room by forcibly opening the door, shoot him down like a dog! Robert, get the blunderbuss. Mind, if he escape, I shall look to you.’

CHAPTER XV.

GUY ANNOUNCES HIS INTENDED MARRIAGE.

WHEN Lucy, Mrs. Hammett, and Guy were dismissed from the steward's room by the squire they went to the dining-room, where the servants had been preparing a kind of medley meal—half-dinner, half-tea—for the wearied and hungry travellers, who had been continuously on their route homeward for several days.

‘When I received your mother's letter to Mrs. Hammett,’ said Lucy in her old, genial tone, and with all her old friendly abandonment of manner towards Guy, ‘I was greatly alarmed. It seemed to me that the matter must be serious indeed to induce you to write to us while we were abroad; and then for some one to undertake to answer you in the squire's name, and to deceive you as to the signature. I went directly to the squire, and put

it into his hand without a word. You may conceive his astonishment, and how we excited one another by our useless conjectures. Within an hour we agreed to return as fast as we could possibly get over the ground, and here we are.' Lucy smiled, and looked altogether so bright and glad, and full of new hope, that Guy felt it a great shock that he could not even for an hour or two delude her into the belief that he shared her buoyancy of feeling. He smiled and laughed, it is true, as she smiled and laughed; responded to her every word and gesture, as though moved by a kind of sympathetic fascination; but there was a something forced and mechanical through all his behaviour; an air of restraint that Lucy did not at first notice, but which soon became obvious to her, while it remained perfectly inexplicable. And so they both gradually relapsed into silence, and sat there waiting the return of the squire in a mood that was fast getting to be as full of gloom as it had just promised to be full of joy.

Mrs. Hammett bustled about, and went in and out to quicken the operations of the cook, saying

every now and then a word, first to Lucy, then to Guy, which they answered only in monosyllables, till even she could not help staring at them both alternately, and wondering if anything had happened. It was a long time before Mr. Dalrymple came to them ; but when he did so he had completely regained his equanimity.

‘So, my brave lad,’ said he to Guy, clapping him on the shoulder, ‘you didn’t care to see me robbed quietly, eh?’

Guy coloured, and said nothing.

‘And what was this precious letter about that the rascal wrote you in my name? I suppose it snubbed you for thinking ill of so good a man?’

‘Something like that, sir,’ said Guy, with a smile.

‘And convinced you you had been mistaken?’

‘Yes, it did, sir.’

‘And what did you do then?’

‘I begged Mr. Pample’s pardon,’ said Guy, simply.

The squire looked at him, then at Lucy, whose face, like his own, seemed to kindle, while the tears sprang to her eyes.

‘Here! come and sit down by me. Let’s have the pleasure of supping in company with one who has the courage to be at once manly and modest—a good deal to say for a young man in times like these. Guy, boy, give me your hand. It will be your own fault if we are not friends henceforward.’

The squire began to eat; but, hungry as he was, he kept stopping to see Guy duly cared for, throwing out the while every instant some fresh question or comment started by the events of the evening. Guy also tried to eat, if it were only to respond to the kindness of the squire, but he could not manage it; he could only feel growing over him a bitter sense of his future, and an uneasy self-questioning as to whether he had acted wisely in committing himself to Susanna. But he was aware that this feeling was the natural result of such sudden and unexpected friendliness, and not of any actual change of prospect; for, in that respect, he was satisfied he was as far as ever from the chance of marrying Lucy, even supposing that Susanna and his engagement with her did

not exist. But when is love logical? He would have given worlds to be able to recall what had passed; but, as he could not, he did his best to resist the many seductive temptations that seemed to be drawing him aside from the path he had chosen.

‘But I can’t understand, my lad, why you destroyed the letter you supposed I had written to you,’ said the squire.

‘It was such a very unpleasant one, sir. I have since thought it was written so that I might be provoked into destroying it directly.’

‘No doubt. But, apart from the comment on your thinking so ill of him, was there anything else in the letter to vex or annoy you?’

Guy hesitated, tried to steady his voice and features before speaking, then said,

‘It spoke of particular motives!’

‘Motives! motives! What did the fellow mean by that? What particular motives could you have had?’

The squire shaded his face with his hand as he looked at Guy waiting his answer. Had the squire

forgotten certain special thoughts of his own—
certain gossipings with Mr. Pample? Apparently
he had, or why did he venture such a question
now?

Guy saw he must be frank and explicit in what
he had to say, and be quick about it too, for his
own sake; so, with heroic courage, he tried to do
his best:—

‘It seemed to refer to Miss Dalrymple.’

Guy stopped, and no one else spoke. Of course
Lucy heard him. There was a dead silence, but
Guy made a rush at the conclusion,

‘Mr. Pample himself spoke to me on the
subject, but I — I — convinced him he was
wrong.’

‘Ay, indeed, how?’ asked the squire; and Guy
thought he distinguished a feeling of relief in the
tone. His pride was stirred, and he was able to
say with apparent ease and unconcern,

‘I told him, sir, that I was going to be married
to Susanna Beck.’

Again there was a marked and painful silence.
Was the squire glad or sorry? Did he think

Lucy was feeling a deep, inward shock, or merely listening to an interesting fact relative to her old playmate? He remained some time in a brown-study, then remarked,

‘ Well, Guy, it’s always something in a man’s life to be able to say, “There, that’s settled; now for the next thing!” You have found yourself a wife—no doubt a good one; I am sure she is a very pretty one; so, that being settled, now for the next thing. Come to me to-morrow, and let us have a little business talk. I want you to help me for the next few days. Since you have managed to put my affairs into a pretty mess by unearthing this vermin and undermining all my business arrangements, I must have your help to set them to rights again.’ Then, in a more serious tone, the squire added, ‘ There will be writings to examine, letters to be copied, possibly personal communications to make—and I do not care to expose my affairs unnecessarily—so you must be my clerk for a few days.’

‘ Yes, sir,’ said Guy, but with so little of cheerful gratitude in the tone that, if the squire had not

at the time been very deep in the contents of a pigeon-pie, he would have demanded explanations, which Guy would have found it inconvenient or impossible to give.

Guy rose to go, murmuring something about his mother's anxiety to know what had been done.

'Ay, to be sure, Phoebe. Dear me! I quite forget her. Tell her from me that she has rendered me a very great service indeed; and that, if she cannot come here, I shall go to her house to thank her personally.'

He then shook hands with Guy, and went on with his supper. Guy was going out, but remembered that, painful or pleasant, wise or imprudent, he must shake hands with Lucy. She had not spoken since his announcement of his intended marriage. He had not heard her move. She sat rigidly upright. Guy had not seen her face; he did not want to see it. He would have accepted even an addition to his future load of trouble to have avoided looking into that face now; but there was no escape. He went to her. He began,

'I wish you—'

She half turned, as if to look, then put out her hand in silence. He took it, felt it was trembling and damp, pressed it, and went his way to battle with his anguish as he might, in solitude.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE NEW STEWARD.

GUY found his mother in such agitation and excitement that he became greatly alarmed. She had even been mad enough, he learned, to persuade his father to consent to take her to the Hall, ill as she was, in the carrier's cart ; and Stephen had gone off to see about arranging the matter with Mr. Gage. For a moment he was quite angry with her. But he soon saw anger was useless. Her cheeks were burning with unnatural heat ; her eyes blazing with unnatural light ; she was in a state of fever, brought on by the sudden news of the squire's return, and the coming of the squire's messenger for Guy. She knew at once what it meant—that her note (which she had written and despatched secretly, by Stephen's aid, fearing Guy would have objected if she mentioned the project to him) had alarmed the squire,

[The page contains several paragraphs of extremely faint, illegible text.]

[At the bottom of the page, there are two handwritten notes:]

"I am not sure, but I think"

"Tim's right, I am."

would ha' gone differently ; but she has been thinking of you for so many years, and—'

'Mother, say no more about it. I shall marry her. That's enough.'

The next morning Phœbe was at first extremely ill ; so bad, indeed, that Guy said he would not go to the squire, but would send and tell him the reason. But Phœbe resisted this passionately, and Guy was obliged to say he would go, though only for an hour or two. But then his mother, as the day passed on, grew better—her mere will seemed to make her so—she seemed to determine she must get better, in order that Guy might go away satisfied of her safety, and might thus prolong his stay to suit the squire's convenience. Guy saw and wondered. He was, of course, also deeply touched by such an evidence of her affection for him, of her devotion to what she esteemed his future interests. At noon he left her, promising he would not come back till night.

Two hours later he was sitting in Mr. Pample's room, at Mr. Pample's desk, writing at the squire's dictation. He found himself slow at first, partly because he knew so little of the matters in hand, but

into sudden action and return home ; and therefore that he had not written the harsh letter received by Guy, nor himself received that which Guy had sent. But Guy gradually calmed her as he narrated all the incidents of his visit to the Hall. How she hung upon his every word ! How eagerly she made him repeat every phrase or sentence of the squire that seemed to promise well for their future relations ! How thankfully she leaned back exhausted upon her pillow, with closed eyes, when she had heard all, and saw that, at last, a true father and true son were to be brought together into an intimacy that she fondly hoped must be perpetual, even though they knew nothing—suspected nothing, of their relationship.

‘ And did you tell them about—about Susanna ? ’ she asked a few minutes later, and in tones so feeble that Guy could scarcely understand what she said, and had to come close to her and listen intently before he made out her question.

‘ Yes, ’ he said, and stopped.

‘ That’s right, Guy ! I did once wish things

would ha' gone differently ; but she has been thinking of you for so many years, and—'

'Mother, say no more about it. I shall marry her. That's enough.'

The next morning Phœbe was at first extremely ill ; so bad, indeed, that Guy said he would not go to the squire, but would send and tell him the reason. But Phœbe resisted this passionately, and Guy was obliged to say he would go, though only for an hour or two. But then his mother, as the day passed on, grew better—her mere will seemed to make her so—she seemed to determine she must get better, in order that Guy might go away satisfied of her safety, and might thus prolong his stay to suit the squire's convenience. Guy saw and wondered. He was, of course, also deeply touched by such an evidence of her affection for him, of her devotion to what she esteemed his future interests. At noon he left her, promising he would not come back till night.

Two hours later he was sitting in Mr. Pample's room, at Mr. Pample's desk, writing at the squire's dictation. He found himself slow at first, partly because he knew so little of the matters in hand, but

chiefly because of his being so unaccustomed to the kind of work ; and of his having it to do under the eyes of the man whom, of all others, he feared, in the nobler sense of the word. But the very necessity of the case concentrated his faculties and enabled him to get along fairly. The squire was not a fast thinker or an acute critic. What he had to say he said with sound common sense and in the simplest language. Guy rapidly understood that, and made use of the knowledge.

The squire had a bundle of letters and papers before him, an undigested mass, which Mr. Pample had handed over, some of them of old date, which had been neglected during the steward's preoccupation in his own secret plans.

' Butts, of Woodland Farm, wants a renewal of his lease. It expires at Christmas. He wants, also, a lowering of the rent. Can't accommodate him both ways. Say so.' And, while Guy wrote, the squire took up the next document and considered it. When Guy was ready, he proceeded :

' Similar application from Cannal, of the Ten Fields. Tell him I have pleasure in yielding to his

wishes. The lease shall be prepared, and the rent reduced ten per cent.

Seeing Guy look a little surprised, and as if doubting whether he had quite rightly understood him, he added, laughing,

‘Oh, I know these fellows; you don’t. Butts grinds his labourers, but he shan’t grind me. The rent’s a fair rent. He might live and let live. I dislike him. But I never refuse to renew a lease if I can help it; so I let him stay. But Cannal’s another sort of man—a kind, sensitive, hard-working fellow; always miserable till he has paid everybody, and then still miserable because he has so little left for his big family.’

After various other matters of a similar kind had been gone through, the whole leaving on Guy a sense of growing admiration of the squire’s principle, kindness, and judgment, the latter suddenly exclaimed,

‘Stop! I ought to have written about more pressing business. Yes; write to Morgan and Joliffe, at Plackett, my solicitors, and tell them to see me directly, and to stop all business they may have in

hand from Mr. Pample, whether on his own account or mine.'

After this was accomplished, he said,

'Send to Messrs. Stanford about that mortgage ; but, no—the solicitors had better deal with it when they come. Add a postscript, to hurry their coming.'

When this was also done, the squire, to Guy's astonishment, said,

'Hold your tongue, and write now just as I dictate.'

Guy took his pen and began :

' "Gentlemen," dictated the squire, "please to prepare an annuity, settled in what manner or on what property of mine you think most convenient, on Phœbe Waterman, for the joint lives of herself and her husband, stating the reason in the document that she rendered me a most important service, and that this annuity is to be considered in the light merely of a grateful acknowledgment. The amount to be 50*l.* yearly." '

Guy wrote with moistening eyes.

‘Have you done?’ asked the squire.

‘Yes, sir,’ said Guy, not daring to trust himself with further speech, between his conflicting emotions, gratitude to the squire, and unwillingness to incur further obligations.

‘Go on with your letter,’ said the squire. And then he dictated as before :

“In your future communications, when the matter does not demand my own personal attention, please address to Mr. Guy Waterman, who will act henceforward as my steward and agent in the management of my property. He is yet but young and inexperienced, and I shall be glad, therefore, of any temporary assistance you can render him. He will not want it long. Of course, he will for the present act under my own eye and direction. I am, gentlemen, yours truly.”

‘There, now stop, and hand it over to me.’

Guy did so, and the squire signed it.

And thus, without his permission having been asked, and without his having a chance of remon-

strating on account of certain secret reasons of his own, Guy found himself raised to a position of high respectability, and in the possession of an income the precise amount of which he knew not, but was sure would prove to be beyond his wildest dreams.

‘I think, Guy, we have done pretty well for to-day. What say you?’

Guy could say nothing. He had risen, and was wondering what it was possible for him to say to his benefactor. He felt half stifled. But, after making two or three beginnings of inarticulate speech, he managed to gasp out, ‘Thank you, sir!’—to grasp the squire’s outstretched hand, and then to hurry out of the room, intending to go back to the village and tell Phœbe she was right after all; that her dreams had come true: he was destined, it seemed, to play the gentleman, in spite of his own humbler determination and views.

But as he was crossing the corridor he met Mrs. Hammett, and he could not help stopping to tell her of his good fortune, for he liked Mrs. Hammett, and he knew she liked him.

She was glad, she said ; but seemed in trouble, and little inclined to heed what he was saying. She was going past, but seemed to alter her mind, and then said,

‘This poor miserable man ! I cannot get him out of my thoughts !’

‘Where is he ?’

‘In gaol, at Plackett. The squire had him removed early this morning. I shall never forget what I felt to meet him in the corridor with handcuffs on ! But oh, Mr. Waterman, is it not dreadful to think of ? He may be hung for this, if the squire does not act mercifully and soften the whole business ?’

‘Hung !’ Guy’s hair seemed to stiffen with horror. ‘Hung !’ and *he* had helped to bring him to that fate ! It was too horrible. Seeing his agitation, Mrs. Hammett said,

‘Would you mind stepping round with me to my young lady ? She is in such distress about it.’ She did not wait for his answer, but moved on, and Guy followed.

He found Lucy in a very charming room, all

white and gold, with choice water-colour pictures on the walls, and flowers on the tables and at the windows. A canary-bird hung in a kind of little alcove, that had a small casement looking into the park. The squire had fitted this room up expressly for Lucy, and called it her bower; and would occasionally come and plead for admittance into it with as much mock-earnestness and deferential chivalry as if he were a young lover and she the mistress of his worship. She was now leaning back in a low armchair, her hands over her eyes, as if to shut out the light, and in so doing she shut out the sound of Guy's and Mrs. Hammett's approach. But she started to her feet the moment they came near, looked at Guy with surprise and a certain distance of manner he had never before witnessed in her, and then waited for him to speak. But he, too, was silent.

Mrs. Hammett bustled forward, saying, 'I have been thinking, my dear young lady, that Mr. Guy, who is to be the future steward—'

'Indeed!—is that true?' asked Lucy, with some agitation, but still in icy tones—almost too icy to be reproachful.

‘The squire did not ask my opinion or consent, Guy pleaded, as if in answer to her secret thought, or what he supposed to be so.

‘Oh, pray do not enter into explanations to me ; they are quite needless,’ said Lucy.

Mrs. Hammett began to think she had made a mistake in bringing Guy, but she determined to go on since she had begun.

‘As I was saying, Miss Dalrymple, I have been thinking this young man—this young gentleman, I mean—may help us.’

‘I should be most glad to do so,’ said Guy.

‘Well,’ said Lucy, after a pause, reseating herself, and motioning to Guy, with a chilling air of dignity, also to take a chair, ‘I find from the squire that our cruel law will hang Mr. Pample if he is convicted of the worst offences of which he has been guilty. His fate, indeed, altogether depends upon the particular charge that Mr. Dalrymple’s solicitors select to proceed upon. I have begged him to choose one that will not in any case affect life. I have been refused. The squire will not let me talk to him about it. But I do not see how

you can do any good ; you may do yourself great harm.'

'I would risk that,' said Guy suddenly ; 'I ought to do so. It was through my act he was brought to justice. I should never have a moment's peace if it were to end as you say.'

They were interrupted—the squire stood there gazing with wonder at the assemblage, but guessed instantly its purport. An angry spot rose on his brow. He was about to walk away from them, but he changed his purpose, smiled off his irritation, came near to Lucy, and sat down by her side.

'What do you think of our new steward, Lucy?'

Lucy's face began to crimson, though with no sense of pleasurable surprise at the question ; but Guy came to her rescue, and broke the significant pause that followed the question:—

'May I ask, sir, whether the stewardship was given to me merely because I have had the good fortune to be accidentally useful to you, or because you think I may with time and experience be really able to perform the duties efficiently and to your

satisfaction?' It was an odd question the squire thought, but he answered it with quiet good nature:—

‘Well, both. I have no doubt you will make a good steward, and—’

‘And will you, sir, be so kind as only to pay me now and hereafter just as I may prove of use to you?’

‘Yes, if necessary to your comfort to make sure of that, I will. You’ll be considerably the loser for a time, that’s all.’

‘But shall I then be under any special or particular obligation—’ Guy could not get any further with such an ungracious-sounding sentence.

‘Confound the fellow! What does he mean?’ thought the squire to himself, but he seemed to be amused by Guy’s eccentricity, and replied,

‘Oh, certainly, the matter shall be so managed as to put you under no obligation, if you are too proud to be obliged even by me. But remember, this puts me on my mettle too. Suppose I decline to remain with my present debt to you undischarged? Eh?’

‘No, sir; you have made my mother a most munificent gift.’

‘And what the devil’s that to you? You are not your mother, are you? She rendered me a service quite independent of you.’

‘Then am I to understand, sir, that you wish me to say or do something to—to—’

‘Certainly. I want you to tell me once for all what I shall do to make all square between us, so that neither you nor any other man can say, “I managed to put Squire Dalrymple under an obligation, and to keep him so.”

‘Then, sir, you will not be offended if I try to do what you require to the very best of my ability.’

‘Certainly not.’

‘Then, sir, please don’t let me feel I must run away from all your kindness—from a future so full of promise for me, and from friends—rather than appear as a witness against Mr. Pample if death is to follow his conviction.’

‘And do you mean to say you would run away?’

‘I don’t know, sir; but I should be sorely tempted, and I wouldn’t have you rely on me.’

Guy could not resist a kind of half smile as he said this and looked at the squire, who seemed to see it, and who turned to look at Lucy and Mrs. Hammett, with the exclamation,

‘So, ladies, it is you, I suppose, who have set this ingenious piece of business in motion? But it won’t do. Hark you, Master Guy, I have refused my niece this very thing. Have you the impudence to suppose I should grant it to you?’

‘Perhaps, sir,’ said Guy, with growing audacity, feeling intuitively the squire was in sympathy with him, ‘she has no claim, nothing but her womanly feeling of pity.’

‘Oh, claim! So you’ve got hold of me at last, have you? Come here, Lucy, give me a kiss, and say you’ll forgive me if I do not disgrace you, and yield to fear what you couldn’t persuade me to yield to love.’

‘Fear! my dear, dear uncle,’ said Lucy, kissing him tenderly though shyly, not liking such demonstrations before observers.

‘Yes, fear! I fear that this young logician, this uncommonly sharp domestic practitioner, will say that he never voluntarily asked me for anything but once; that then he had a right to a favourable answer, and that then I refused him. No; I can’t stand that. There, there; I’ll tell the lawyer to draw it mild, and spare the vagabond’s neck for your sake.’

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. PAMPLE'S BANK.

THE day after that on which Mr. Dalrymple had consented so reluctantly to spare Mr. Pample the extremest infliction of the law, he was for a long time closeted with Mr. Morgan, his solicitor, explaining to him the steward's proceedings, and taking counsel from him as to what ought to be done with the different parties upon whom the steward had passed off his frauds. It was a question full of complexity, and one calculated to throw the squire from his moral balance by tempting him to repudiate wholesale all the transactions that had been wrongfully completed under his name, a process which would have materially lessened his estimate of loss. But, after listening for the second or third time to the exposition of the law of the matter in the more

important cases, he suddenly interrupted the lawyer by saying,

‘ I see, Morgan, it is of no use my attempting to unravel so knotty an affair. The very attempt only makes my head ache, and my brain gets more confused. So we’ll settle it thus : First, discover the law in each case, giving the other parties the benefit of the doubt, if any doubt exists ; we shall then know those cases, if any, where the loss must be mine ; act at once with regard to them, so they will be got rid of. Next consider, not merely as a man of business, but as a man of honour, whether, as regards those cases wherein the law is clearly on my side, there be anything in the nature of the transaction itself, or in the accompanying circumstances, that would suggest that the loss, in all or in part, should be borne by me ; if so, I will bear it. Finally, where you are clear that neither legally nor morally (and I don’t wish you to give too narrow a meaning to the latter word) that I am bound to pay, if there are such cases, then say at once to the parties I will not ; no, not under any circumstances. And mind, if you do say so, you

must stick to it. Will that do for your guidance in settling the whole ?'

'Yes, but I must put one question more ; there may be cases—and I fancy I see them here—where the loss should be shared—'

'Then by all means offer to share if the law is with us, and make the other side consent to share when the law is with them, if you can,' said the squire, with a forced laugh.

'Then, I understand ; and upon the whole I am inclined to think that we shall manage to lessen your apparent losses.'

'Honourably ?'

'Honourably, of course. But now as to Pample ?'

'Ah, yes, I was coming to him.'

'Of course he will be indicted for forgery ?'

'No ; I have been talked into mercy. They won't let me hang him.'

'I'm afraid that is equivalent to letting him off altogether.'

'Nonsense ! You cannot mean that.'

'Consider, my dear sir ; we cannot move a step

without facing an act of forgery. Suppose we charge him only with a breach of trust, I doubt whether there is a single case in which we could make the proof clear and the result certain without showing at the same time that we had gone out of our way to evade the legitimate subject for punishment—the forgery so many times repeated.’

‘It can’t be helped. It must be so. People must think me weakly indulgent if they please.’

‘But, excuse me, sir; a lawyer, you know, always likes to look at the worst side of things. Suppose the judge were to stop the case, and ask why the criminal had not been properly arraigned, and if it were true that the prosecutor himself was a magistrate?’

Mr. Dalrymple rose from his seat in considerable disturbance of mind, and walked to and fro. He saw the propriety of the observation, and acknowledged to himself that if he were prepared personally to carry the matter off with a high hand as concerning himself alone, and even to forget his local duties, he certainly was not prepared to be publicly reproved.

'I won't break my word—certainly not! I won't have him hung by any act of mine, that's clear. Neither am I inclined to let him go scot free. Least of all do I accept the danger you properly point out. What, then, is to be done? Can you suggest anything?'

'Well, I have been thinking this: perhaps he might be glad (knowing nothing of your intended indulgence) to compound by pleading guilty to a charge that did not carry with it capital punishment.'

'That's it! that's it! Get that managed, and I shall be not only relieved, but personally obliged to you.'

'I will do my best. I will go at once and learn who are his solicitors. You are sure he knows nothing of your promise?'

'Quite sure. He cannot. It was heard only by my niece, the new steward, and my housekeeper, who are not any of them likely to be in communication with him.'

'Please to warn them, as additional security, while I go to see the gentlemen who act for him,

and try if I can get them to do what we want as though it was they who wanted it.' The squire smiled, and so they parted.

Precisely at the same moment of time that this conference had been held another was in progress on the same subject, in a different place. Let us see what was there done. But let us first glance at the building and the place in which it stands. Plackett, the county town, stands on the very edge of a long sweep of hill, commanding a range of magnificent country. The buildings not only occupy this edge for a considerable distance, but spread back along the level ground on the top, and also stretch downwards far into the wooded valley beneath. Among the buildings on the heights—which are for the most part highly picturesque—there is one that arrests the eye of every stranger—a massive, decayed-looking round tower. This is all that remains of the castle, an ancient structure, and intimately connected with some of the most noticeable events of our history. Near the giant keep appears a modern building of somewhat fantastic architecture: this is the county gaol,

standing within the circuit of the castle wall, parts of which, with a massive embattled gate, still exist. It is to a dark stone cell of that gaol that we now take the reader, where sits a man with his elbows on the rough and strong deal table, and his face clasped between his hands, looking blankly towards the whitewashed stone walls. His hair within the last few days has turned almost white; there are deep hollows under the eyes; his lips from time to time slightly quiver, but they utter no sounds. Still he sits looking fixed and hopelessly at the blank, heavy walls. There is a sound of steps. He starts to his feet, and his face looks expectant and excited. The key grates in the door, the door slowly opens, the turnkey enters, and after him comes a shabby-genteel looking man, with papers in his hand.

‘Ah! my dear Sharker, is that you at last?’ exclaimed Mr. Pample, rising, and hurrying to shake hands with the new visitor. Again Mr. Pample tried the old smile, but somehow it refused to come, and perhaps its quondam owner remembered it was no longer necessary.

‘I ’spose you’ll want paper, and pens, and ink bringing, now the lawyer’s come to get up your case?’ inquired the turnkey.

‘No, thank you,’ said the new comer, ‘I’ve got all with me.’ He then produced from his pocket a roll of paper, an exciseman’s inkbottle, and two or three quill pens from a pasteboard case. The turnkey went out, the ponderous door was swung to and closed, the key again grated in the lock, the steps of the departing gaoler were heard faintly echoing through the vaulted passages, and they were alone.

‘I am so glad you’ve come,’ observed Mr. Pample. ‘I began to think you had determined to desert an old friend in his hour of trouble.’

‘No, no, nothing of the kind. But, you see, you said nothing about payment; and my partner and I had an idea that you had got yourself quite cleaned out, and then you know—’ He stopped, and finished his sentence with a cough, after which he looked at Mr. Pample and waited.

‘But, Johnny, remember you have had a good deal of money from me in times past.’

'I can't for the life of me remember anything of the kind, if you mean to draw unfair, unbusiness-like conclusions from the fact.'

'Well, I thought,' observed Mr. Pample with a sigh, as though some real sense of the ingratitude of human nature for the first time came home to him, 'I thought—' but he stopped and presently began again in an altered tone. 'How much do you want to satisfy you to take up my case?'

'Come, that's business!' cheerfully observed Mr. Johnny Sharker. 'We won't be hard upon you, but we can't afford to lose time, or money that must be expended in your service. If you can give or secure us a hundred pounds on account we'll see to it that you are done justice to—that nothing shall be wanting. Though I don't mean to say that we can manage for that sum to secure any very expensive witnesses—hem! You understand? There are witnesses, you know, who might be worth the whole hundred to you under such critical circumstances.'

'Yes, I think I understand,' said Mr. Pample, in

a melancholy tone, 'but my case admits of no help of that kind.'

'Well, come—time's passing!'

Mr. Pample looked round — hesitated — then glanced furtively at Mr. Sharker's face, which appeared simply impassive—prepared for anything, but to be surprised at nothing—not even at having to find his old playmate and subsequent client a pauper, and himself obliged to go back with a curse at the folly that had brought him on so fruitless an errand. Mr. Pample then said,

'Will you listen carefully at the door, and warn me if you hear anyone coming?'

Mr. Johnny Sharker jumped up instantly, certain now that there was real business afloat. He went to the door and put himself in a listening attitude, as he said,

'All right!'

Mr. Pample sat down on his low truckle-bed in the corner, and began to unlace one of his boots in silence. Presently he took it off, and said to his companion,

'Have you a knife?'

'Yes.' Mr. Sharker produced a pocket-knife, and opened out a good strong blade with a pointed end. Mr. Pample then began to insert the blade under the heads of some of the small nails that were in the heel round the edge until one of the thicknesses of the leather came off, some of the nails still sticking in it that had fastened it to the rest of the heel. He then disclosed a little hollow in the base of the heel, from which he took some dirty bit or bits of paper tightly folded up, so as to lie in the smallest possible space, and which had been still more compressed by the tread of the foot during many days.

'Well, I do call that clever!' observed Mr. Johnny Sharker, while scrutinizing as closely as he could from his distance the nature of the said paper; and, even moving a little nearer to the bed till stopped by Mr. Pample's waving and warning hand pointing to the door in reminder of his duty as sentinel.

'How did you manage it?' he softly asked.

'Why, the night I was trapped in my room I thought of you.'

‘How kind!’

‘And your possible wants—’

‘How very kind!’

‘So I got out these notes from where I had placed them.’

‘Bank of England?’ asked Mr. Johnny Sharker, in a gush of affection and sympathy.

‘Yes; and while I was considering how it was possible to conceal them securely, I remembered I had lately had a bit of leather put on the thickness of my heels (which had worn down), and it struck me I might get one of the pieces off, and make a bed for the notes. I had my own knife then (they took it away when I came here), so I managed it as you see. And I got all the nails in again so cleverly that I could not myself see any difference between the two heels, except that the one looked a little fresher and cleaner than the other, the nail-heads in particular being more bright. But I rubbed them well with moistened dust, and walked about in whatever dirt I could find, as opportunities offered, so that at last, when my boots were examined here with the

rest of my clothes, they were passed without suspicion.'

'Capital, capital!'

Mr. Pample smoothed out the crumpled paper, and there appeared to Mr. Sharker to be only two notes, though he could not be sure, as Mr. Pample concealed his hand as well as he could. One of the notes was laid aside on the bed, and the other or others were refolded and restored with a care and precision that almost wore out Mr. Sharker's patience, though conscious it was 'business.' But when Mr. Pample had so thoroughly satisfied himself as to venture to hold up both his legs and boots to Mr. Sharker, and ask him if he could tell which of the two was the 'right one,' and had heard from Mr. Sharker that he was fairly puzzled, then Mr. Pample fetched the note from the bed and gave it to the expectant lawyer, who saw it was a Bank of England note for a hundred pounds.

He examined and re-examined the precious bit of paper, to make sure there was no deception, and that it bore no marks that might in any special way interfere with its subsequent value in his hands.

But at last he put it in his pocketbook, with an air of decision, and said,

‘That’s enough. Now, tell me all about it.’

‘Of course you must know the exact facts?’

‘Well, I suspect you’ll be humbugging yourself if you try to humbug me.’

Thus confirmed in his own notions of what might be necessary, Mr. Pample related the whole of his doings with the most exemplary truthfulness, once or twice even checking a momentary error of Mr. Sharker which made his conduct seem less black than it was.

Now, Mr. John Sharker, though a very ‘seedy’ member of the law, and not particularly liable to be affected by notions of humanity, even where an old friend was concerned, did obviously show a more and more gloomy and hard face as the narrative proceeded. When it was over he put down his pen, pushed back his papers, and sat for a time looking at the ground in deep silence. Mr. Pample noted his behaviour, and trembled with a deeper consciousness of his position than he had before experienced. His face grew almost green in its ghastliness. But he,

too, said nothing—only waited. At last Mr. Sharker said in a dry, husky kind of voice,

‘It’s no use deceiving you. What can be done shall be done. I and my partner will consult. We’ll also get counsel’s opinion as to any conceivable chances of escape; but—’ There he stopped, and quite involuntarily put his hand to his neck, and rubbed his beard. Mr. Pample’s soul grew sick within him, and for a time he had not courage to speak another word.

‘My own opinion is, Mr. Pample,’ continued Mr. Sharker, after a long and terrible silence, ‘that this is no case for dodging justice. I know I could and would hang half-a-dozen men on such stuff as that.’ Here he pointed to the memoranda on the table. ‘No, your only chance is to throw yourself on the squire’s mercy.’

‘It would be useless,’ urged the ex-steward in tremulous yet eager accents, as if wishing to be convinced he was in the wrong. ‘I know him, and know how he looked and spoke when I confessed to him.’

‘Don’t think I am not willing to earn this hundred

pounds in a legitimate way—I mean by doing everything that can be done by fair means or foul ; but what's the use of setting out knowingly in a wrong direction? I don't want to frighten you, but you'll hang, sir, as sure as you are now alive and listening to me, if we can't persuade the squire to mercy.'

'Would you ask him to let me off altogether?' murmured the almost paralyzed man.

'No, of course not; 't isn't likely; and I should say you'd be a fool and deserve your fate if you dreamed of such a thing.'

'What, then, could he do?' asked Mr. Pample.

'Why, it wouldn't be easy, and without our help it might be altogether impossible.'

'Pray, pray, speak!'

'I mean this; if he wouldn't press any of the acts of forgery your life would be safe. But you know they go on hanging forgers in spite of all the Radicals can say.'

'But then—the—the difficulty!'

'Why, the squire's a magistrate; the case is a good deal talked over; there's a general rumour that it's a very black one. Well, if he were from

merciful motives to charge you, say only with breach of trust, I doubt if he could prove that without also proving that you ought to have been indited on the capital charge.'

'But might I not plead guilty to the lesser charge? I mean if he would let me?'

'Certainly; but then they ought to have some confidence in us, and I fear they won't have a bit.'

'I can't understand.'

'Can't you? You're strangely blind all at once. Suppose we were to get their consent, and they not perfect their proofs or collect their witnesses? But, no! we can't suppose that—they wouldn't be such asses!'

'But why should they go to all that expense and trouble if I am to plead guilty?'

'Suppose, if they didn't, we were to say at the last minute we had altered our minds? Oh, I see you understand now.'

'Yes; but, gracious Heavens! can any human being be so lost to all feelings of humanity as to suppose a man in my position—'

'Better talk of my position! They might rely a

little on that—on my sense of what is professional and necessary.’

Mr. Pample began nervously to walk about the cell, stopping occasionally below the only window (which was quite out of reach) to get a little fresh air upon his burning brow. After a while he came to his companion and said in a tone which carried conviction even to that not very credulous listener, Mr. Sharker,

‘Johnny, my life is in your hands. Do what you can for me—make any promise you like for me, and trust me—oh, trust me! But that is not all I want to say to you.’ Again he hesitated a half-minute or more. ‘Johnny, I laid by, for—for emergencies like this—five hundred pounds. One hundred you have got. All the rest is here.’ He lifted his right foot and put it down again. ‘You shall have all if you save my life. Only save my life; I ask no more!’ In his passionate earnestness he clasped his hands, and seemed for the instant to think Mr. Sharker had that life at his disposal. ‘Let me be sent abroad—for life, or for a term of years, and all this is yours.’ If I

ever get free in a foreign country I shall be a beggar—absolutely a beggar, for I have nothing else in the world, unless they give me back the small money I had in my pocket when arrested.'

'Well, but what security can I have, if I do succeed, that you will give me the money? Suppose by any quirk or bit of luck you got off altogether and walked away?'

'Make me your debtor—'

'Not exactly. Oh dear, no!'

'Wait!—do hear me quietly. Make me your debtor by note, bond, or what instrument you like, on the condition stated—'

'I doubt if that wouldn't vitiate the instrument.'

'Then give me a separate document stating why I have given you such a security?'

'Well?'

'You can then arrest me upon the security the moment I leave the dock if I really do get freed, and, as you know my secret bank, it will be your own fault if you don't secure your rights.'

'There's something in that, but not much; you

won't get freed. The practical question is, whether you can be saved from the rope; and, if so, how do I know what you might afterwards do with this money? What power should I have over you then? A felon sentenced to transportation, probably? Why, they wouldn't even let me see you again, most likely.'

'What can you suggest?'

'Can't you trust me with the care of it till—'

'Certainly; but—'

'You'd rather not? Well, I'm not offended; only then you mustn't ask me to trust you.'

'Is there no third party we could both confide in?' asked Mr. Pample.

'There might be; but then he must be a man who can get in here and receive it from you,' was the reply.

'Stay, I have it,' suddenly exclaimed the steward. 'It's very likely you may have to persuade Morgan and Jolliffe to come here to see me if you make way at all. They are men to be trusted. I don't like them; but I'd trust them if they undertook.'

'Very well, then; here's a sheet of paper, and there's a pen,' said Mr. Sharker.

Mr. Pample folded the paper up in the form of a letter, and wrote on the outside, 'To be given to John Sharker, Esq., unopened, if my life be happily spared; or, if otherwise, then to be given to Geoffrey Dalrymple, Esq.' He then handed it to the lawyer.

'Yes. I see, Mr. Pample, your shrewdness hasn't deserted you. You thus put it into hands that will certainly hold it as against me if I fail to save you.'

'That was the proposition—wasn't it, Johnny?'

'Yes. Come, now to business. I'll see Morgan and Jolliffe directly, and probably, if I succeed in inducing them to accept your trust, you'll have one of them here before night. But keep aloof from any other matter. Leave all that to me. And now, before I go, can you give me any help whatever? Can you offer the slightest hint, suggest any fact in the least degree hopeful, to induce them to be merciful?'

'Only this. The night when I was caught (for

all this dates from that infernal night, now many weeks ago) there was a young poacher brought to the Hall, to be confined there till the morning. But he escaped after midnight, by passing through my rooms, and then it was he overheard my settling with Mr. Stanford about the mortgage. Having lost a paper while absent for a few minutes from my room, I got uneasy, and began to suspect, and at last I heard of his being in the house, and I went to see if he was still in the room. He was gone; and I knew then he must have taken my paper with him. But what I wish to mention to you, is this: I discovered he had been set free by the squire's own niece, Miss Lucy Dalrymple.'

'What, at midnight?'

'Yes, and not only that, but I found, subsequently, the squire knew nothing about the proceeding, although he ingeniously covered it by saying something of his own wish for the fellow's escape, and that she knew he wished it.'

'I see what you're driving at. A valuable fact, certainly, if not too roughly used; but, between our-

selves, do you think she was moved by anything more than an impulse of pity ?'

'I am sure of it. I know they were and are both in love, though what sort of love it must be you can guess, seeing that both knew well enough that she could never marry him.'

'And you think the family mightn't like this fact to be brought out in court and commented upon, eh?'

'Judge for yourself.'

'And how long were they together?'

'Who on earth can tell that?'

'Good-by! Keep up your spirits. If we can save you we will.'

'Good-by!'

Mr. Sharker had to thump heavily upon the door for some time to call the turnkey's attention before he could get away. At last, however, he was duly released, and Mr. Pample left alone. Again he fell into his former attitude, elbows upon the table, and the head clasped by the hands; and he seemed to renew his study of the blank wall with new interest, as though it were no longer blank to

him, but that, on the contrary, he saw a good deal written there. Once he smiled a real honest smile—honest, that is, in the sense that there was no hypocrisy in it: it did represent some inner emotion that tickled his fancy and brightened it up for an instant—an instant, however, only. The sense of his terrible danger began again to come down upon him, as though in thick black clouds, making the cell grow darker and darker, and his thoughts more horribly wild and vivid, till at last his eyes seemed to grow infected by them and to penetrate those massive stones, and pass beyond, and see a vast ocean of haggard, upturned faces, and an upraised scaffold, and on it a priest, and an executioner, and—himself! A faint shriek burst from him as he leaped up, and shook his hair, and passed his damp, trembling hands over his eyes, and tried to convince himself he had dropped asleep, and seen all the vision in a dream.

CHAPTER XVIII

‘WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK.’

MR. SHARKER had his own special difficulties to encounter in arranging a meeting with Morgan and Jolliffe ; one—by no means the least—of which was the doubt whether they would see him at all. They were locally at the head of the profession ; he and his partner belonged to the tail. They were accustomed to refuse all but strictly respectable business ; he and his partner had rarely anything offered to them but that which was more or less disreputable. Still, Mr. Sharker was always so polite and obsequious to the great men when they did meet, that the latter had found it impossible actually to quarrel with him. But Mr. Sharker never found himself in their stately private room, but he saw they looked as though they would like to kick him out ; and at times he had found it hard to

avoid telling them a bit of his mind, but he always thought better of it before too late ; so he was able to go now and ask for an audience, and probably would get it for a minute or two, but that was all, unless he could in some way or other frighten or interest them into a protracted interview.

However, there he now is, in the very room itself, for he has tipped a half-crown to the youth who opened the door, and he now waits the coming of Mr. Morgan, who he hears is expected back every minute from his visit to the squire at Branhape. Mr. Sharker sighs as he looks round on the well-bound law-library ; the handsome mahogany black-leathered tables with their hosts of drawers ; and the gigantic safe ; and he wonders whether, if he were to do only the best kind of business, he would ever get to have such surroundings. But he promptly comes to the conclusion he would starve at the outset of his career. At last Mr. Morgan's carriage is heard at the door—'his own carriage !' sighs the spectator who looks out over the wire blinds. Again delay. Mr. Morgan is in no hurry to greet his visitor. More delay. Perhaps he doesn't choose to

come, or has forgot all about Mr. John Sharker. No, he is here. The door opens as if the hinges moved in oil, and Mr. Morgan enters—a short, rosy, well-fed gentleman, the reverse of Mr. Sharker, who is tall, bilious-faced, and hungry-looking. A distant, haughty bow is responded to by a low, almost reverential one—suddenly broken, however, by an abrupt erection of the head, as if the owner remembered he, too, could stand upon his dignity.

‘I come, Mr. Morgan, on the part of my unhappy client.’

‘Oh—Pample! Will you take a seat?’

‘Of course I may speak without prejudice. We are like confessors, who receive and may communicate together in the interests of our clients.’

‘Speak of yourself, Mr. Sharker, and your client.’

‘Well, I say again that this interview must be without prejudice, must be looked on as strictly confidential, if unhappily it should end in no arrangement.’

‘Arrangement!’ Mr. Morgan echoed, lifting his eyebrows slightly.

‘Well, never mind the word. Thus the case

stands. Why should you seek to take this poor man's life ?'

'I! It is the law, Mr. Sharker, not I.'

'That's all very well, Mr. Morgan ; but if he's of my mind he won't trouble about the law if he only can get a comforting word from you.'

'What could I say for him? I think him—begging your pardon, as he's your client—the biggest, blackest rascal I ever came across. Now, shall I try to say that in some language that will be likely to benefit him ?'

'But the family exposure, Mr. Morgan! The exposure, sir !

'Exposure! What the d— do you mean?' suddenly asked Mr. Morgan, with quite new interest in the dialogue.

'Of course I mean no harm, I believe no harm, but I put it to you, would it look well to the world to have the fact coming out that your young lady—a most virtuous and admirable young lady I doubt not—goes after midnight to visit a confined poacher, and sets him free—her own uncle knowing nothing, as he confesses, till afterwards of what she had done ?'

Mr. Morgan was puzzled, and did not for the moment quite know which were best, to kick the vagabond out who dared to suggest such a diabolical notion to him, or to go a little further into the matter, which was quite new, and might be of more importance than he was aware of. Caution won the day; he repressed his angry and trusted to his inquisitive impulse. But he found Mr. Sharker all at once reserved and incommunicative in turn. What he had said he abided by; but it was a delicate subject—too delicate to be talked about unnecessarily by men of honour and fathers of families, as they both were.

‘What is it you want!’ roughly demanded Mr. Morgan, when he saw the new position that had been taken up.

‘Well, sir, if I tell you at once all I want, and you see it is not very unreasonable, and that it will not bear modifying because I ask only for that which is indispensable—’

‘Indispensable!’

‘Indispensable as a matter of asking, I mean.’

‘Oh, go on.’

‘That then you will perceive how thoroughly I understand the liberal, gentlemanly, and honourable firm with which I deal in giving at once my ultimatum.’

‘Ultimatum!’ repeated Mr. Morgan to himself, and again looked fiercely at his companion, but Mr. Sharker did not blench; and Mr. Morgan, thinking there must be more in this affair of Miss Lucy than he quite made out, quickly answered,

‘Fewer words, Mr. Sharker, would go further. You want—’

‘Encouragement for this poor man, who throws himself on your mercy.’

‘And, pray what do you call encouragement?’ asked Mr. Morgan slowly, and shading his face the while from the strong light that just then streamed in and blazed over Mr. Sharker’s high cheekbones and cunning features.

‘Well, you know a conviction for forgery’s an ugly business.’

‘So’s the forgery itself; particularly when done by a man in whom the most implicit trust has been placed.’

‘But don’t be hard. He’s ruined utterly. Can’t you be content without stringing him up like a dog?’

‘I do wish you would speak plainly, Mr. Sharker. I fear we are wasting time. I really can give you but five minutes more.’

‘Well, sir, if I must speak, then this is what I respectfully submit to you and to the squire. Tell the poor fellow that if he will plead guilty to such charge or charges as you may bring against him you won’t press the forgeries. That’s all I ask.’

‘This is an unexpected proposition, and one that takes me by surprise. But stay! Before we go any further, does your client know of this appeal?’

‘Without prejudice, Mr. Morgan?’

‘Without prejudice, Mr. Sharker. You may safely answer without risk of prejudice.’

‘He does, then.’

‘And if the squire could be persuaded, and if I could see my way to sanction such a course—in the cause of humanity’—Mr. Morgan hemmed and coloured a little, as though conscious he had caught himself in a fib—‘If, I say, the appeal could be at

all listened to, could you pledge yourself for your client?’

‘Oh, beyond doubt! Isn’t his very life at stake?’

‘And you, Mr. Sharker?’

‘Am not prepared to sacrifice my character?’ But suddenly remembering Mr. Morgan might think this assurance of dubious value, he added, ‘I am not prepared to be struck off the rolls.’

‘Of course, if we did give you a favourable answer, we should proceed all the same.’

‘You mean as to collecting proofs, witnesses, &c.’

‘Not them only, but the indictment. We should frame it with counts for forgery and for some lesser matter, so that if any trick were attempted—’

‘Oh, my dear sir, if you could see the miserable man just as he now is, you would be angry with yourself, I am sure you would, for thinking of anything but his life-long gratitude.’

‘I have seen a little of the world, Mr. Sharker.’

‘Yes, yes, of course you have. I stand corrected.’

'Well, I'll have my horses put in again, and run back to Branhape.'

'And if you get a favourable answer, will you kindly go to the prison and see him yourself—speak a word of hope, and judge of his state of mind? It would be a charity.'

'I don't think I can promise that.'

'But he wishes it. He will have more confidence if you tell him so than if I tell him; and he wants to confide to you some letter.'

'To me?'

'Yes; he knew not, he says, whom else he could trust so implicitly to execute a dying trust, if he is to die.'

'But if not,' asked Mr. Morgan?

'Why, then he wishes you to hand the letter to me, and he has instructed me how to dispose of it.'

'But what have I to do with it in any case?'

'It is for the squire, if things go badly with him.'

'Oh, indeed! Well, then, I'll go to the gaol as soon as I return, if there's any good news to carry.'

'There will be—must be!'

‘We shall see.’

The lawyers parted. The same evening Mr. Pample had another visitor—Mr. Morgan. It was a painful meeting. They had been accustomed as gentlemen to meet and gossip, and occasionally to visit at each other’s houses. Mr. Pample, however, was too much absorbed in the question of the result to reciprocate the lawyer’s delicate feeling. He listened with bent head to Mr. Morgan’s statement about the interview of the morning, and only looked up when that gentleman finished by the question,

‘And now, I suppose, you guess why I am here?’

Mr. Pample began to murmur words of confession, of guilt, and of hope of mercy.

‘Yes, yes; it’s all managed. You’ll get transported, and then it’ll be your own fault if you don’t, after a few years, right yourself and begin a new career. We shall make as little fuss about the trial as possible. And now what about this letter that Sharker talks of?’

Mr. Pample took from his pocket the cover he had prepared for the bank-notes and handed it to

Mr. Morgan, who read the inscription:—‘To be given to John Sharker, Esq., unopened, if my life be happily spared ; or if otherwise, then to be given to Geoffrey Dalrymple, Esq.’ He mused a moment, then seeing it was a mere cover, he said,

‘But there’s nothing in it?’

‘No, sir,’ said Mr. Pample ; ‘but if you will allow me—unobserved—to put something in—’

‘Oh, of course ;’ and Mr. Morgan turned away.

Mr. Pample then drew from some secret place he had found or made about his bed, in order that he might be ready with them at a moment’s notice, four bank-notes of a hundred pounds each, and enclosed them in the cover. He then handed the packet to Mr. Morgan, saying—

‘Would you be so good as to ask the turnkey for means to seal a letter—your letter—when he comes?’ He then knocked at the door and shouted till the turnkey came, who was very deferential to the visitor, and made no objection to his request, but immediately brought a seal and wax and went away.

‘Please, sir, to allow me to seal it,’ said Mr.

Pample; and, Mr. Morgan giving him back the packet, he sealed it with trembling and excited hands, and again placed it in the lawyer's charge.

'And I am not to give this up to you, even if you wish me?'

'N—no'—said Mr. Pample, with a lingering intonation that told plainly how much what he was doing must be against the grain.

'Very well. Good-night! The trial will be on the 10th, I expect. But keep your mind easy. Good-night!'

'One moment, sir. I am not going to speak for myself. All this sad business came out, you know, through young Waterman's presence at the Hall. Of course, you will take care that Miss Lucy is not compromised in connection with her visit to him. It was she, you know, who let him loose, and sent him through my rooms, when he overheard me with Mr. Stanford. She's a noble young lady, and I shouldn't like to have any injury to her character, however innocently on my part, added to my other offences. That's all. And now, may Heaven bless you, sir, and the noble squire!' These were

the last sounds heard by Mr. Morgan. What would he have said if he could have heard Mr. Pample's outburst when he was gone,—

‘Safe! safe! The shaft went home! They dare not hurt me! They’ve found it out! That’s their mercy! Now to be cool—cool—and wary! My life’s at stake; but what’s the value of the life they offer me? Nothing.’

Mr. Pample went and sat on the bed, and began to ruminate in profound silence.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TRIAL.

IT is the day of the trial. Crowds of people are hurrying in and out through the castle gate. They are chiefly farmers and farm-labourers drawn together from distant parts of the country, with a sprinkling of the townspeople, and here and there a gowned and wigged barrister on his way to the court. Through these moves a plain carriage belonging to the squire, in which is a pale, worn-looking invalid closely wrapped up and leaning back ; while from the window on one side looks out Guy, and from that on the other Susanna, upon the busy assemblage. It is not supposed that Phœbe's presence is actually required, and the counsel for the prosecution offered to do without her ; but at the last moment, moved by some impulse she could not herself account for, she said she thought she would venture.

Before putting up his horse at a quiet inn, Guy determined to see Phœbe comfortably provided with a seat, so told the driver to go to the entrance-porch of the court. Arriving there, he jumped out and gave Susanna his hand, who took it and stepped lightly and gracefully to the ground, while smiling in answer to the simple admiration of a rustic bystander who was looking on her face and movements with eager curiosity ; she then turned to help Guy to get Phœbe down from the carriage. But as Phœbe stood feebly up, holding the carriage-door, ready to step out as soon as she felt able to venture the movement, Guy slid his arm round her waist, bade her lay her own arm on his shoulder, and then, with the ease resulting from his great strength and his tender care, lifted her out and carried her right into the vestibule, Susanna following. There they met Mr. Morgan, who led the way into the court by a private door used only by the barristers and by other favoured personages, Phœbe still resting her arm on Guy's shoulder, and he bearing her swiftly along, so that but few persons noticed them. Presently

Phœbe found herself sitting with Susanna on a soft, comfortable seat in the corner of an enclosure in the very centre of the court, where she could see everything and be herself but little seen. Guy then went away to find a suitable place to put up the vehicle, promising to return immediately; and Susanna shifted her position from where Guy had placed her on the left of Phœbe to the latter's right, so as to get into the full blaze of observation without actually getting away from Phœbe. She then opened out her skirts, shook her ringlets, looked very pretty, very innocent, and very full of wonder, and had her reward, for every eye was drawn towards her. Phœbe, on her part, looked about with a strange and nervous glance. The court was but yet half filled. The bench before her was empty; the jury-box on her right was fast filling, and barristers and attorneys and clerks were humming and buzzing about. After awhile she shut her eyes, used her smelling-bottle repeatedly, and then, shrinking back into the corner she occupied, waited as though she took no further interest in the scene.

Some one touched her shoulder; she started, and, in spite of her weakness, would have stood up, but that the squire laid his hand—a little shaky with age and excitement—upon her shoulder, and said in low tones,

‘Sit still. Glad to see you are able to be here.’

He then moved away and joined Mr. Morgan and a gentleman, whom Phœbe supposed to be the counsel, from his wig and gown.

Susanna leaned over to her and said,

‘I don’t see Miss Lucy.’

‘No, of course not,’ answered Phœbe rather shortly; ‘I should ha’ wondered if she had been here.’

‘Why?’ asked Susanna.

Phœbe did not appear to hear the question, for she had just remembered that Susanna knew nothing about Miss Lucy’s share in Guy’s escape from the Hall. Guy’s return saved her from further questioning. He sat down by her side in the seat vacated by Susanna, and the latter gave him a little pout as their looks met at his want of gallantry in not coming next to her, but smiled on

him forgivingly and graciously a moment after. The judge now entered and took his seat ; and the sheriff and other gentlemen who followed him took their seats with due solemnity and at an impressive distance from the awful representative of the majesty of law. The business began ; just then Mr. Sharker came in and stood and moved about in a fidgety, restless manner, looking toward Mr. Morgan, who was at some distance and unapproachable, until at last he caused a bit of paper to be forwarded from hand to hand to that gentleman, who read—

‘ Did you receive the packet from the prisoner ? ’

Mr. Morgan drew the letter a little way out of his side pocket, so that Mr. Sharker might see it, but deigned to take no further notice of the question, and seemed again to engage in close whispering with the counsel. But Mr. Sharker smiled, and seemed to be at once placed in a state of entire mental satisfaction ; so great, indeed, was it that he had to make an effort to sober the muscles of his face, while he appeared to become exceedingly interested in the case then going on : an

important one which preceded Mr. Pample's. It was soon over; not, however, before some little bustle and excitement began to be noticed among the barristers and the people congregated in their neighbourhood. Once—nay, twice—the usher had to send forth his sonorous warning,

‘Silence! Silence in the court! Sit down!’

Guy was one of those who had risen, and who was thus warned to sit down. What was it that disturbed him? A scrap of paper had been just put into Mr. Sharker's hands, which he had read and been greatly moved by; but which, after throwing off his excitement in two or three demonstrative gestures, he folded up in another piece of paper (torn out of his pocket-book, after scribbling a few words upon it), then forwarded both, as before, to Mr. Morgan, who read:—

‘In justice to myself I have determined, if I am persecuted any further, to tell the whole truth. I have done my best to conceal the facts regarding the young lady and the proceedings of that night; but I must now be content to clear myself and

leave the world to judge why I am pursued so vindictively.

‘GEORGE PAMPLE.’

The addition by Mr. Sharker ran thus:—

‘I knew nothing of this till this very moment, so help me Heaven! I throw up the case.

‘JNO. SHARKER.’

Mr. Morgan looked at Mr. Sharker, who shrugged his shoulders, and appeared the very picture of conscious helplessness, begging that it might not be misinterpreted. Mr. Morgan whispered to a clerk who sat writing near, ‘Find Mr. Jolliffe instantly—at any cost.’ He then went to Mr. Dalrymple and put the bits of paper into his hand. He could not but fix his eyes on that noble head with its silvery hair, still noble in spite of its near approach to eighty years. He saw the growing surprise, the sudden flush, the fierce indignation, the intense scorn, loathing, and horror. The squire met Mr. Morgan’s glance, both looked towards the door, and both quietly slipped out;

Mr. Morgan touching Guy as he passed, who followed with vague apprehension.

When they reached the vestibule, they met Mr. Jolliffe out of breath, who had gathered from his partner's message that something serious was in hand. They drew together into a corner and held rapid counsel.

'Squire,' said Mr. Morgan, 'Time is most precious; if we don't act instantly this infernal scoundrel will escape; perhaps, in addition, fasten for life on Miss Dalrymple's character a stain that may be practically ineffaceable, unless indeed you consent to yield to his threat, and let him go free.'

The squire looked terrible, but kept a grim silence, waiting to hear further.

'Miss Dalrymple must be got here—must be appealed to—your promise must be withdrawn by her consent.'

'But you?' said the squire, looking at Guy, 'do you know what all this means?'

'No, sir,' faltered Guy.

'Read that.' Guy read; and as he again raised

his face, which had become perfectly white, he said, almost between his fixed and meeting teeth,

‘Mr. Morgan is right, sir.’

‘Very well, then,’ said that gentleman, ‘who will fetch her and Mrs. Hammett? I cannot. You, squire, ought to keep near. Mr. Jolliffe is a stranger to the young lady, and might be unable to allay her alarm; besides, I want him.’

‘Guy, lad, you must go,’ said the squire, in his deepest tones.

‘Yes, sir; I have a carriage close by.’

‘Fly then!’ urged Mr. Morgan. And Guy an instant after was leaping down the steps outside the court three at a time.

‘Now, Jolliffe, no more make-believes. Forgery!’

‘Of course.’

‘Take Stanford’s case. Take also the bank cheques, so as to be ready if we fail with Stanford’s. Stanford is here, so will be Guy, Miss Dalrymple, and Mrs. Hammett. The banker’s clerk shall be fetched. There are your witnesses complete. If the case comes on too soon I’ll ask

for a postponement for an hour or so, avowedly as waiting for Miss Dalrymple. Pample himself—the beast—can't object to wait for her after what he has here written.'

So saying, Mr. Morgan went directly back into the court.

'Jenkins,' said Mr. Jolliffe to the clerk, 'find Mr. Stanford, and bring him after me. Then you'll have to run to the bank, and fetch some one to speak to these cheques.' As the clerk hurried away Mr. Jolliffe continued, 'Now, squire, if you please to go with me.' And they also went off, but in a different direction, Mr. Dalrymple still preserving the same grim silence.

Susanna and Phœbe wondered when they saw the gentlemen go out, and again they wondered when they saw Mr. Morgan return alone and sit down close by the counsel, with whom he began to whisper; but their surprise grew indeed almost unbearable when, at the conclusion of the case in hand, they heard the name of 'George Pample' called out, and saw that gentleman enter the dock, dressed in the genteelest black, with the snowiest of white

neckcloths ; and saw the squire's counsel get up and request that a short delay might be accorded, as a material witness was absent, who would soon be there ; and whose presence, he understood, was desired by the prisoner as well as by the prosecutor.

‘Is that so?’ asked the judge, addressing the prisoner. There was a pause—one so long, that every person in court was struck by it, before the answer came, hesitatingly,

‘My lord, I make no objection.’

‘Let the next case be taken,’ said the judge. Mr. Pample accordingly disappeared into those lower regions from which he had come, and a woman charged with manslaughter took his place.

While Phœbe prepared herself to listen to the case of this woman, she glanced aside, hoping for the return of Guy, who might perhaps tell them about the missing witness. Thus, she saw the effect produced on Mr. Sharker, by the brief dialogue between the counsel and judge, which told him the squire meant to proceed, and that all the facts must come out. His face seemed white with fear, and bedewed with perspiration.

But Phoebe has a new surprise—an interruption by the grand jury.

‘Why do these gentlemen,’ asks she of herself, ‘come in and stop the business; and why do they mention names, and say they have found true bills against them?’ And, gracious Heaven! what is that she now hears?—a true bill against George Pample for forgery and embezzlement! Didn’t Guy tell her he was to be let off from the capital charge? She sees the gentlemen retire, she hears the counsel resume his speech, and again she turns with sickening anxiety towards the door.

Mr. Sharker again scribbled, and again the bit of paper went on its way through several hands to Mr. Morgan, who read:—‘I demand the letter. I fulfilled my engagement. You gave the prisoner the answer which he sought to my appeal for him. Give me the letter, else I keep no measures—stick at nothing to defend myself and client—even though I may have to attack. Hand me over the letter, and I leave the fellow to his fate.’

Mr. Morgan wrote back—

‘As far as I am concerned, I would prefer that

you do your best for yourself and client. He will need your aid. He is in great danger. I make no charge against you. Can't give up the letter till I see finally to whom it belongs.'

Mr. Sharker read, and lost not a moment in giving a signal to one of the counsel he saw disengaged, and they were both in a few minutes in deep consultation with the prisoner in his temporary underground abode.

'Are you mad?' was Mr. Sharker's first salutation to Mr. Pample. 'Do you know they are proceeding against you for forgery?'

'Forgery! I—I feared so,' gasped Pample.

'What the h— does it all mean!' demanded Mr. Sharker, growing ferocious.

'Why, I—I thought they would be unprepared after what had passed; and even if they were not, I—I believed they would not risk the young lady's reputation. Liberty's sweet, and—'

'Ay, but life's sweeter. You haven't been such an idiot as to put your head wilfully into the noose? You've got some case, I suppose, to justify such risky game?'

‘Yes—yes,’ nervously responded the prisoner, whose every limb still shook from the fall of that thunderbolt upon him—the counsel’s demand for delay while they fetched Miss Dalrymple—the proof that he was, after all, to be tried for forgery. Let us leave the trio to their devices, and return to the court.

Still Phœbe waits impatiently, looking towards the door, and still Guy returns not to her. But she strives to listen to the woman’s case : a very sad and painful one.

It is not till near the conclusion of this that she sees the clerk peer in with an important-looking face, and beckon to Mr. Morgan, who slips out instantly, and finds himself a moment after the centre of a group, consisting of Miss Dalrymple, Mrs. Hammett, the Squire, Guy, and Mr. Jolliffe.

‘Oh, uncle, is it not dreadful?’ Lucy was saying. ‘Guy has told me all about his treachery and base ingratitude. I see there is no escape. I will do whatever you wish, only I do so tremble! I fear I shall not be able to speak, or know what I am saying when I do.’

The squire took her aside, and said,

‘My brave girl, I can see Guy has not told you all ; he has kept the worst from you, leaving it for me to tell you. This wretch, besides his other treacherous artifices, is threatening you.’

‘Me, uncle?’

‘He dares to hint that you compromised yourself the night you set Guy free.’

‘Oh, uncle, uncle!’ And the poor girl’s colour, which had been vivid with excitement, notwithstanding her dread of a public appearance in court, became of a deadly hue, and she burst into sudden and passionate weeping.

‘There is but one way, darling, to meet such attacks, when you have the cruel misfortune to be obliged to deal with them at all ; that is, to resist at any cost. Shrink, and you are lost. Your truth, innocence, and courage, depend upon it, will carry you through, with God’s blessing. There now, there ; dry up your tears ; compose yourself ; take no forethought of what you shall say or do, but answer to the questions put to you, as if a direct messenger from the Deity were your questioner.

What they want is to tempt you into some falsehood or inconsistency that may give strength to their villainous imputations. I will stake my life, if necessary, upon your purity of soul. Rouse then, maiden mine! defend all that is dearest to you and to every true-hearted woman. You will be surrounded by friends devoted to you, and who will cleave to you as to their God.'

Lucy listened, and, though she still quivered like a beautiful reed shaken by the wind, she pressed the hand she held in silence, and the squire led her back to the group, saying,

'Gentlemen, we are ready.'

And then, at last, Phœbe's longing eyes were gratified by the sight of the returning Guy—returning, too, with noticeable company. She and Susanna knew now who was the long-missing witness. Room was made for Lucy to sit down; and it so happened, and to Susanna's intense disgust, that, through her own change of seat in the morning, Lucy and Guy now sat next to one another; while the squire stood by Lucy's side, his tall figure, white hair, thin but noble features, and

stern aspect becoming the mark of every wandering glance.

The case for manslaughter came to an end ; the woman was convicted and went off pleading piteously for mercy, for the sake of her poor children, who would starve while she was in gaol. Phoebe began to wish she had not come, and seemed only able to keep her seat by incessant use of the smelling-bottle. Did her own unsuspected guilt just then seem blacker than that of the woman who had in a moment of passion forgotten herself ?

And now Mr. Pample reappeared in the dock. The indictment was read, and he was asked whether he pleaded guilty or not guilty.

‘Not guilty,’ he said, in a voice of unexpected firmness, as though conscious he must fight boldly, or perhaps because of some new hope suggested by the meeting with his attorney and his counsel.

After a brief explanation of the case by the counsel for the prosecution, he called the squire as the first witness.

Let us say, once for all, we are not about to describe in complete detail the course of a criminal

trial; all we aim at is to draw the reader's attention to those particular passages of Mr. Pample's case which specially attracted the attention of the auditory or obviously tended to determine the result.

'Please to look at that document. It professes, does it not, to be a mortgage on certain property of yours for 16,500*l.* ?'

The paper was handed to the squire, who looked at it and said,

'Yes.'

'Is the signature yours?'

'No.'

'Did you ever authorize in any way the preparation of such a mortgage?'

'Never.'

'When did you first learn of its existence?'

'When my present steward charged the prisoner with the act in his presence and in mine on the night of the arrest.'

'Until that discovery you placed, I believe, great trust in the prisoner?'

'I would have trusted my all in his hands any time during the last twenty years.'

Counsel sat down and another counsel jumped up to cross-examine.

‘Pray, Mr. Dalrymple, did you ever, on any occasion, give authority to the prisoner to sign for you? Please to reflect.’

‘Yes, a year or two back, when I found I could no longer conveniently attend to all these things myself, through growing age and infirmity, I gave him a power of attorney, so that my own signature might not be necessary in unimportant cases.’

‘Exactly. He has been accustomed to act for you very much as you would act for yourself. Did he ever purchase shares for you in any commercial undertaking in his own name, by your consent?’

‘Never. I beg pardon; he once, several years ago, recommended me to invest in some canal property, but I was busy at the time with other matters, and gave him no definite answer. He told me subsequently he had bought some shares for me, thinking I had given him sufficient authority, but I declined to have them transferred, saying, however, that if any loss accrued he might charge it to me.’ •

‘I will only trouble you with one more question. Has it ever happened that you have used money belonging to the prisoner?’

‘I, sir? I do not understand you.’

‘Pray consider, and recollect.’

Here the question was repeated. A contemptuous smile broke over the squire’s face as he said,

‘Oh! I think I know now! I had once sudden occasion for a larger sum of money than was lying in the bank, and the prisoner made up the difference, and repaid himself, a few days later, from my rents.’

‘I thank you, sir,’ said the counsel, bowed, and sat down. But before the squire could descend the stairs of the witness-box he was re-examined by his own counsel.

‘Did the vicarious authority with regard to your signature in unimportant cases extend to the mortgaging away of your estates?’

‘Of course not,’ answered the squire, with a bitter smile.

‘Of course not!’ echoed the counsel. ‘Did you receive any profit from those shares?’

‘It so happened that there was a loss, which was

duly charged to me, but I told the prisoner distinctly, at first, that I would have nothing to do with profits, if any accrued, as the shares were not mine.'

'As to the temporary loan to you: did that signify that you ever stood in any other relation to the prisoner than as his master, paying him a large salary, and holding him accountable as your servant?'

'Certainly not, except in the accidental way I have mentioned, which, I believe, is the only instance of the kind that ever occurred.'

Mr. Dalrymple then left the box; and the counsel called Mr. Stanford, to whom, after some formal questions, he said,

'With whom did you arrange the details of this mortgage?'

'With the prisoner, exclusively.'

'What did he say to you about it?'

'That he was carrying into effect Mr. Dalrymple's instructions, who wished the matter to be kept in strict privacy.'

'And did he give any reason?'

‘Yes, that he wished to buy another estate nearer home to give to his niece on her marriage, which the prisoner suggested to me was likely to happen before very long.’

‘And did Guy hear him say this when he left me that night?’ asked Lucy of herself, as she sat hidden in the deep shade of her veil. ‘Oh, yes; I begin to understand.’ She sighed, and again bent forward to listen.

‘Look to the signatures of that document. Did you yourself see them written?’

‘I regret to say I did not. I ought to have done so, but I had such faith in the prisoner’s integrity and position, that I believed him when he said he had just seen the squire sign it, and that he had himself added his own signature, with that of another witness, in the squire’s presence.’

‘You are on your oath, Mr. Stanford, and the prisoner’s life is at stake. Do I understand you distinctly to say that the prisoner told you he had just seen the squire sign that document?’

‘As God is my witness, that is the simple truth?’

There was a pause, and a great hush in the
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court. Presently it was broken by the cross-examination :—

‘ How was the money paid to the prisoner ? ’

‘ By a cheque. ’

‘ Was it crossed to any bank ? ’

‘ Yes ; with the names of Jackson and Sons, Plckett. ’

‘ Mr. Dalrymple’s own bankers, are they not ? ’

‘ The prisoner said so ; and I have since learned that that was correct. ’

‘ The prisoner pays in the money, which he is supposed to have obtained by fraud and forgery, to the very bank of his employer. That will do. ’

Mr. Stanford went down.

‘ My lord, ’ said the squire’s counsel, ‘ I wish, with your lordship’s permission, to further examine the prosecutor. ’

‘ Please to step up again, sir, ’ said the judge to the squire.

‘ Have you your bankers’ book here ? ’ asked the counsel.

‘ I have two books here—covering the last twelve-months ; one, the book that the prisoner has been

accustomed to show me, and the other, a book I received from him for the first time only after his arrest, which he said was the true one.'

'Do your bankers confirm that statement?'

'Yes.'

'Do you find a sum of 16,500*l.* paid in to your credit in either of the books?'

'Yes.'

'In which?'

'In the true one.'

'You mean the one you did not see?'

'Yes.'

'Do you find, on seeing your bankers' true book, that you are this 16,500*l.* richer than you thought.'

'I find myself nearly 10,000*l.* poorer than I appeared to be by the book that the prisoner alone permitted me to see.'

'Notwithstanding the fact that the 16,500*l.* was included as paid to your account in the true book?'

'Yes.'

'How do you account for that?'

'I object to the question. I submit, my lord,'

said the other counsel, jumping up, 'that we want facts from this gentleman, not inferences.'

The judge decided that the question might be put.

'The explanation is, unfortunately for me, only too simple. He has used my money as if it were his own—has paid in, for instance, this 16,500*l.*, obtained as you have seen, to draw it out again by forged cheques.'

'My lord, I really protest against this kind of evidence.'

'Are you prepared to prove the forgery of the cheques you speak of?' asked the judge of the prosecutor's counsel.

'I have a bundle of them in my hand, my lord,' said the squire, interposing.

His lordship said no more, neither did the prisoner's counsel.

'Thank you, sir,' said the other counsel; 'we shall not, I hope, again trouble you. Guy Waterman!'

The squire descended, and Guy stepped into his place. Phœbe's eyes blazed with their old light, as

she saw such a conjunction of father and son, only known to her of all the world to be such.

‘Good God! how like they are! Does nobody see it?’ she murmured inly.

Guy, whose appearance and manner, at once so manly and modest, as the squire had rightly characterized it, and so strikingly handsome when, as now, emotion brought any colour into his cheeks, excited quite a stir among the auditory. His sudden rise on the ruins of another man’s fortune made many incline to think unfavourably of him. But there was something so winning—so free from all pretension in his face, attitude, tone, and words—that, as he proceeded, there came to be but one opinion as to the squire’s good sense in choosing his new steward.

Guy was first led on to describe, by the questions put to him, the proceedings of the eventful night when he was confined at the Hall; and when, during his escape, he overheard the conversation between Mr. Pample and Mr. Stanford; the counsel’s object being to show how the prisoner’s guilt had been made known; and also because he knew there was

another and more delicate matter which could not be evaded, and which Guy's presence in the witness-box would bring on. Determined, however, to leave to the prisoner and his advisers the entire responsibility of the meditated outrage, he so skilfully managed his questions that Guy had not yet been obliged to say a single word about that subject which he so much dreaded—Lucy. But he, too, knew the time must come, and was nervously wishing to have it over.

The cross-examination begins:—

‘You were a poacher, Guy, were you not, before you managed to get into your present post?’

Guy felt he would like to be able to answer with a blow; for the tone was even more insulting than the words. But he knew what great interests were at stake. Lucy was there—was listening—might be injured or benefited for life by his conduct now. So, setting his foot hard on the ground, he said, ‘I have at times gone with poachers.’

‘And had friends and associates among that class?’

‘Yes.’

‘And, in fact, got your living in that way?’

‘No.’

‘How then?’

‘By helping my father, who is a small master-carpenter.’

‘O yes, we understand all that. I never knew a poacher yet that hadn’t an exceedingly respectable calling which occupied all his time.’

Guy knew not what to say, so was silent.

‘Pray, Mr. Guy Waterman,’—again the tone of the ‘Mr.’ made Guy’s eyes flash, but provoked no other manifestation—‘had you any visitors that night in your temporary prison?’

The squire, who had sat down in Guy’s place the better to hide his own dreaded emotion, pressed Lucy’s hand at this, and received, he thought, an encouraging touch in answer.

‘Yes; Miss Dalrymple.’

‘About what time might this be?’

‘I cannot tell. I think a little after midnight.’

‘You cannot tell—but think a little after midnight. Were you surprised?’

‘Very much.’

‘ You were very much surprised. I don’t wonder at it. A confined poacher receiving a visit some time after midnight from a young and beautiful lady—the niece and heiress of the owner of the mansion! Had you known her before?’

‘ For many years.’

‘ You had known her for many years. Had your acquaintance ever been at all intimate—I mean had you ever walked together—talked as friends talk, at all confidentially?’

‘ Yes, till as we grew older the difference in our positions gradually prevented—’

‘ Why, then, should you have been surprised to receive such a visit from an old friend?’

‘ I was—I can’t exactly tell why.’

‘ You were surprised, but can’t exactly tell why. How long did this young lady stay with you?’

‘ I cannot say precisely—a few minutes—not more, I think.’

‘ You are on your oath, sir! I ask you again, how long did this young lady stay with you?’

‘ I can give no other answer. I was too much troubled to measure the time.’

‘You were too much troubled to measure the time. Did she give you any reason for coming?’

‘Certainly; she—I mean the squire—perhaps I ought to say both, wished me to get away, so that no further proceedings might be taken.’

‘And did you go instantly?’

There was a little pause, but Guy broke it with a clear manful ‘No!’

‘You did not go when she came to set you free. Why?’

‘My lord!’ appealed Guy in a desperate mood, ‘am I required to explain not only facts but my thoughts and feelings?’

‘Is it necessary, Mr. Plawsiber,’ asked his lordship, ‘to press this line of examination?’

‘My lord, as I am instructed, it is vital to the interests of the prisoner, as well as of justice, to show the motives that led to this prosecution.’

‘Very well, then; you must give the best answer you can, young man,’ said the judge to Guy.

Thus compelled, Guy said in a low voice, ‘I was in a despondent state of mind about many things—about my fate—about certain feelings I had secretly

cherished towards—towards Miss Dalrymple; I was dissatisfied with myself, dissatisfied with her for not being kinder to me; hopeless, desperate; and I hardly knew what I said.'

'And did you finally leave her in the same state of mind?'

'No.'

'You can go down.'

'Stay!' said the judge. 'Did any personal familiarities of any kind pass between you?'

'She held my hand as she led me through the corridor to the steward's room?'

'Nothing more?'

'No, my lord' And Guy was allowed to leave his place of torture.

Mrs. Hammett was next called to give evidence that she had heard the prisoner confess to the squire (in answer to Guy's charge) that he had signed the mortgage in question and had witnessed the squire's surprise and excitement at the discovery.

'Lucy Dalrymple!' was now called. The squire led her to the foot of the stairs of the witness-box,

no longer daring to say a word to her, either by way of advice or encouragement. He could only press her soft, damp, and trembling fingers, and leave the rest to her own native strength and the protecting Unseen Hand.

At first she stood before the court with her veil almost covering her face, but when she threw it back at the judge's request he, like all the other persons present, was struck by the extreme sweetness and modesty of the countenance. Just a little colour had come into the pallid cheeks at the spectacle of all those people gazing on her ; and, though there was a kind of mute, unconscious appeal in her soft, blue, loving eyes against brutal violence of any kind to a maiden's sacred inner life and feeling, there was also a something about the lips and broad white brow that spoke of resolution and fortitude.

The counsel for the prosecution merely asked her a few unimportant questions in corroboration of Mrs. Hammett's testimony, and then said,

‘My lord, I believe the prisoner's counsel wished to examine this young lady ; and it is, in fact, for them we have summoned her.’ And he sat down.

His brother counsel accepted the challenge, and began at once.

‘When you determined to release this young man—this young gentleman I suppose I may now call him—were you influenced by any other motive than the mere desire to set him free?’

‘I—I think not, sir.’

‘You think not. Can’t you be sure?’

‘No!’ was faltered out; but still the word was heard at the furthest corner of the court, so hushed was the assemblage.

‘I wish to spare you pain, but I am bound to get at the truth. I ask you, then, on your oath—do not answer me till you have reflected well—did you not, then, love this young man?’

‘I—I fear I did!’

If this answer was heard with amazement and sympathy by most persons in that court, what must Guy have felt to stand there and listen to it in common with all the world? What the squire? What Susanna?—who, however, did not seem the least overcome by the revelation, but looked to see what others thought:—What Phœbe? Its effect

was decisive. The counsel, with a half apology and with a respectful bow and exultant look, dismissed her; but she had yet to be re-examined—just for a moment only—as her uncle's counsel said:—

‘Did you then, or do you now, think him capable of taking an unworthy advantage of your kindness and of the sentiments you have expressed?’

‘Oh no, indeed, sir. But he could not—he did not know; at least I did not tell him. And he has never said so much to me at any time as he has said here to-day. Perhaps indeed, sir, I ought to state that if—if he allowed me to guess somewhat of his feeling, it was only to make me understand that he did so for the last time that night.’

‘I thank you. That will do.’

‘Before you go, Miss Dalrymple,’ interposed the judge, ‘allow me to express my pleasure at the frank and satisfactory manner in which you have given your evidence.’

Lucy dropped a little curtsy to the judge, though she felt so tremulous that she had to support herself directly after against the woodwork of the box.

The judge bowed, and did not take his eyes from the sweet, tearful, grateful-looking, and impassioned face till the veil dropped over it, and she glided down the steps to be received by the squire, who was almost as much shaken as herself. A moment after she and Guy were again sitting necessarily side by side in a silence that was truly terrible, and through which each seemed to hear the beating of the other's heart.

The prosecution was ended. All eyes turned to the prisoner—all ears bent forward to know what he would say. At that time counsel were not permitted to address the court in defence of accused persons; so Mr. Pample unrolled a sheet of paper that he had held in his hand through the whole trial; and, after casting a furtive and anxious glance round the court, scarcely raising his head, he began to read from it in a hesitating and quivering voice that after a while grew more steady as he seemed to gain confidence:—

‘My lord, and gentlemen of the jury, standing here as I do, seemingly on the brink of the grave,

I shall not waste words in legal subtleties; neither shall I make unworthy appeals to your sympathies or to your indulgence. That I do need all your care, wisdom, and sense of right, is, unhappily, too true. I know well what it is to stand before you a poor and friendless man, and to have arrayed against me one who is wealthy, who is personally honoured, and who commands all the prestige attached to an old family and to magisterial rank and influence. But, my lord, I know that you will interpose the shield of law if I am unlawfully pursued; you, gentlemen of the jury, will, I am equally certain, listen to facts with stern impartiality, and give the benefit of your doubt, if any such should be left on your mind, not to the persecutor, but to him who is persecuted. For, my lord and gentlemen of the jury, I say, standing in the Almighty presence, this is a cruel, monstrous persecution. I am no forger, no thief! I will prove this to you, however difficult—nay, incredible—such a proof may seem. I did not think I should have had to relate so sad and shameful a story to-day. I came into this court believing that the charges

against me would be withdrawn. I am therefore imperfectly prepared; but even thus, I confront my enemies boldly, relying on my integrity, and wounded only to discover the reward proposed for the devotion of my life through nearly a quarter of a century.'

Mr. Pample here broke down, as if overcome by emotion.

'Take time,' said the judge, kindly. 'The court can wait.'

Mr. Pample bowed, drank from a glass of water, and went on:—

'The court will have seen—though I lament to say most imperfectly—the closeness of the relations that existed between Mr. Dalrymple and myself. It has been acknowledged that the squire had money of mine at one time in his possession. Oh, my lord, he has had the entire savings of my life. Every shilling that I could spare, after providing myself with the merest necessities, has been returned into the squire's hands, or invested in speculations in which we were to be sharers, though my name alone was to appear. Hence the exist-

ence of these two bank-books, both of which were as well known to the squire as to me—the one showing his actual position and deficiency with the bank, the other our actual position together, as including my investments. But it is not necessary to dwell on these minor features of the case; you will understand how to deal with them when you have learned the nature of my reply to the principal charge. You have heard this gentleman, this magistrate, this man hoary with the snows of nearly eighty years, deny that he knew anything of the mortgage. And yet, wonderful to say, he owns that the money was actually paid in to his credit at his own bank! Why, does it not carry absurdity on its face, such a charge? Still, my lord and gentlemen of the jury, he denies it. And, had not Providence protected me in a wonderful manner, I might have been surprised. What is my word to the word of such a man as Squire Dalrymple? I say then, and I say it proudly, unhesitatingly, that I did not sign his name, not even as acting for him, as I have so often done. I say he signed it himself!

The story overheard by Guy Waterman was the

actual naked truth. To that I pledge myself; of that I will convince you. Oh, I pray you, do not turn away from me without a hearing'—this was said parenthetically to one of the jurymen who had moved a little either through fatigue or disgust—'you know not what is coming !

'But while you wait for me to prove this, which disposes of the whole case, you will naturally ask why I confessed to the signature in the presence of Mrs. Hammett and Guy Waterman. I will answer that also ; but it is here I earnestly conjure you to listen without prejudice. I shall say but little ; my lips are still too closely sealed by my own act, my solemn and reiterated oath. It is enough, then, to state that the day after the night when Guy Waterman passed through my rooms I had to make a most painful communication to the squire, and he was for a moment overwhelmed by it.' Here he was interrupted by a low muttering chorus of

'Shame! shame!'

'Silence!' cried the sonorous and angry voice of the usher.

‘I will have the court cleared,’ said the judge, sternly, ‘if such interruptions occur again and the offender be not made known.’

Mr. Pample continued :—

‘He made me promise never to reveal what I had told him—made me swear I would never again, under any circumstances, mention what I had discovered. Of course I was glad to obey him. He, then, acting on my advice, determined to remove the young lady ; and I ask you, my lord, and gentlemen of the jury, to consider for yourselves what kind of event must that have been which could have induced him to go off on a protracted tour within six hours of my speaking to him? Every one at the Hall will confirm me in this, that it is certain that he was not going away when he sat down to breakfast, for all the family arrangements for weeks to come were well known, yet by night he and Miss Lucy were gone.

‘I have nearly told my story. You will now understand, my lord and gentlemen of the jury, why, up to the date of that journey, I was treated as an honoured and trusted servant, and why, suddenly on

the squire's return, I was charged with this monstrous crime. I did for the moment own I had signed the mortgage; but it was because I fancied the squire wished to conceal from Miss Lucy that he had once meditated giving her the estate in question, but had altered his mind after hearing my communication as to her conduct. And he himself immediately took me apart, and owned this had been his motive; and then demanded that I should unsay all I had said about Miss Lucy in her and Guy's presence, and acknowledge myself a slanderer. Of course, I refused. You see and know the rest. It is not for me to picture to you by what arts the squire was persuaded to disbelieve my previous statement to him on a matter concerning the honour of his family; or to guess at the motives that could have induced him, even when so convinced, to become one of a conspiracy to destroy me.

‘My lord, and gentlemen of the jury, I have no more to say. I wish only to have Martin Galt called and examined by my counsel.’

‘Martin Galt!’ thought Mr. Morgan. ‘Is it

possible? I thought he had gone abroad. What does this mean?’

Martin Galt came forward, creating a great deal of commotion as he forced his way through the crowd; for, in order to meet Mr. Sharker's views, he had carefully kept aloof from the other witnesses, and no one knew of his intended appearance. He was a stout, round-faced, and uncommonly good-looking man, one of those persons whom you like at the first glance; but whom—however, we will not anticipate. After certain unimportant questions, the prisoner's counsel inquired,

‘How many years have you lived at the Hall?’

‘Nearly six.’

‘What did you do?’

‘Sometimes I helped Mr. Pample as his clerk, for I write a good hand; and at other times I was a sort of assistant to the butler.’

‘Why did you leave?’

‘To go abroad. I wanted to better myself, and a relative wrote to me from the United States.’

‘Had you a character from the squire?’

‘ Yes, sir; here it is.’

‘ Will your lordship please to look at it?’ said the counsel to the judge.

The judge did so, and sent it to the jury. It was evidently a good one.

Martin Galt took the opportunity to wipe the perspiration from his brow, and to drink down a whole glass of water.

‘ Were you at the Hall on the night of the ——?’ Here the counsel specified carefully the night in question.

‘ Yes.’

‘ You had then left the service, I believe. What took you to the Hall?’

‘ Mr. Pample met me that morning in the village, and said he should want me to witness a deed or mortgage, or something of that kind, as I had often done before.’

‘ Did he say anything else?’

‘ Yes; that the squire did not want to have anything known about it—there was to be a surprise for Miss Lucy.’

‘ Well.’

‘And so I was to come in by Mr. Pample’s staircase after dusk, that I might not be noticed.’

‘And did you go?’

‘Yes, first to Mr. Pample’s room, where I found him; then he took me to the squire’s little study.’

‘Yes; and then—?’

‘Well, and then,’ said Martin Galt, ‘I found the squire there, and he signed a paper—a big sort of document—and Mr. Pample signed, and then I signed, and the squire gave me a guinea, and laughed as he said, “That will help you on your way across the Atlantic.” Here’s the very piece he gave me.’ And Martin Galt produced a guinea, and held it up.

‘Look at the document now handed to you. Is that the one you signed?’

‘Yes.’

‘Do you swear to it? Do you swear that you saw the squire sign that document?’

‘I do; and Mr. Pample too. We all signed it.’

‘And then?’

‘And then I went out and went home.’

‘Did you meet any of the servants?’

‘No person whatever, though I heard ‘em moving about.’

‘How happens it you are here to-day? Was it not thought at the Hall that you had sailed?’

‘Yes; my ship did sail some time since, but I had obtained permission from the owners to wait for their next ship, as I had some money to wait for.’

‘So that it is only through this accident that the prisoner has been able to have you here to-day?’

‘That’s correct, sir.’

‘My lord and gentlemen of the jury, we have nothing more to say.’

The excitement in the court was now extreme. Men and women looked on one another as if asking what their neighbours thought, while unwilling to commit themselves to an opinion on so strange a case. Everyone saw that, black as the affair looked at first, there was a kind of completeness and likelihood in the answer. Mr. Pample had done one very wise thing. He had only suggested what he wished to be believed about Miss Dalrymple, and many of his auditory began from that moment to fancy there was something in all he had been saying. Mr. Pample

himself lifted his head hopefully, nay, almost with a kind of virtuous indignation apparent in the moral sternness of his countenance, as he ventured to look down towards the squire.

But what is that noise, that struggling in the back of the court?—those low but passionate exclamations of—

‘I will! I will! Let me get in.’

‘My lord,’ said Mr. Morgan, ‘I think—I trust—there is something going on yonder that—’

‘Bring that woman forward,’ said the judge.

As the officer of the court did so, the judge saw an aged woman, evidently in a state of extreme excitement and alarm.

‘Who are you?’

‘The mother of Martin Galt—God help me!’

‘Do you want to give evidence in this case?’

‘Oh, my lord, my lord! I have prayed that I might not have to do it; but he deceived me, and he threatened me—and—’

She was stopped, sworn, and sent into the witness-box. The judge himself then questioned her:—

‘What do you know of this matter?’

‘Oh, my lord, Martin was at home ill the very time that he swears he was at the Hall.’

‘How do you know that?’

‘Because Mr. Pample came to see him the next night, and it was he who then told me the squire had gone off suddenly that very afternoon.’

‘Do you know anything of what took place when the prisoner came to your house?’

‘No, my lord; they were alone together in Martin’s bedroom, where he lay ill.’

‘But could he not, unknown to you, have got out?’

‘Oh no, my lord. I never lost sight of him for more than a few minutes together the whole evening.’

‘And why have you only told us all this at the last moment?’

‘Oh, my lord, he is my son; I wished to save him from the disgrace. I found out what he intended to do, but he promised me he’d give up all idea of it, and I thought he had gone to-day to another part of the country on private business of his own. But my heart misgave me—and the

squire has been in times past so good to all the poor that I couldn't help coming here unknown to Martin—and—'

'See to that man,' said the judge, suddenly, for Martin was making off.

As Martin was arrested he said aloud, in a fierce tone, 'It was that vagabond Sharker, who offered me two hundred pounds to help him to save the prisoner's life!'

People looked for Mr. Sharker, but he had already glided away; resigning, we presume, all hope of the mysterious letter and its contents, which he and Martin were to have divided.

Then, turning to the prisoner's counsel, the judge said, 'Have you any question to ask this witness?'

The counsel looked in vain for Mr. John Sharker, and then glanced at Mr. Pample, as he said,

'No, my lord. I did as I was instructed.'

'Quite right, Mr. Plawsiber; no one blames *you*.'

We need not follow the details of the trial any further. Mr. Pample felt his blood freezing as he listened to the judge's brief but fatal charge—

watched the faces of the jury before bending down to their dread communion, and after they rose up again—heard almost instantly (for the jury paused only long enough to exhibit their sense of the solemnity of the occasion) the verdict—**GUILTY**—saw the black cap put on—followed the awful and merciless tones of the judgment, which bade him renounce all hope, were it but for his infamous charges and suggestions against the prosecutor and his family—till he collapsed, and dropped down upon his knees in the dock at the word **DEATH**, feebly crying,

‘ Mercy ! mercy ! ’

But his condemnation was not to be the last incident of the trial. There was one who had for some time past gazed on the prisoner with a kind of fascination—revolting from the man, yet attracted by the very horror of his fate. She saw beneath that white face what was passing in the man’s breast—took with him all the fatal steps that were to lead him out of life ; and, in fine, experienced at once so horrible a sense of mingled attraction and disgust, that, when she heard the final close, she burst out

with a piercing shriek, as if it were she who was sentenced—a shriek that rang through the whole place before it subsided into wild hysteric laughter, and then suddenly ceased.

‘It must be Martin’s mother,’ said some of the people in a distant part of the court. No; it was—Phoebe Waterman.

END OF VOL. II.



